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THE MOTHER OF THE MAN

THE MOTHER OF THE MAN

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF "CHILDREN OF THE MIST," ETC.

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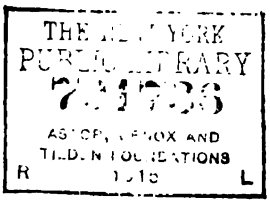
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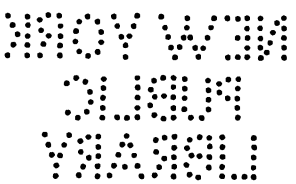

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

FALLING LEAVES

CRIMSON and tawny and sere, the leaves once more cast down their mantle upon the bosom that bore them, and the dominions of the bough paid back their due to the kingdoms of the root. In withered clouds and companies the flying legions hurried through air and over earth. The rustle and whisper of them was as the murmur of little ghosts; and heart of man, according to its mood, read sorrow into the sound, or the seemly music of obedient multitudes hastening to pay a debt. The flights of the leaves were scattered in constellations above the forest and blown breast-high along the channels of the lanes; they were caught by the rivers, and their ruby and amber argosies danced in masses to brighten foaming waterfall and silent pool; they were drifted against the trunks of ancient trees and banked along the hedgerows; they filled the rabbit-holes and made nightly work for the coneys. Like children to mother earth they returned and nestled in the lap of her who had known the end from the beginning; who had waited through bourgeoning and budbreak for the fall of the leaf; who had ordained the destiny of every glade and dingle and laughing canopy of green. The leaves were paying for the pageant of the year, heaping their sweetness upon the earth and returning the precious things garnered at tree-top to the hidden workshop that lifted and maintained each unit of the forest commonwealth.

To them had belonged springtime and the song of the thrush; theirs were the silver rain of May, the glow of the June sunshine, the moist kisses of the night wind roaming to welcome another day. They knew the red

moon that swam up over the forest edge; cast off the tinctures of earth in her ascension, then turned an argent shield to the world and set the dim dew flashing. Theirs were the visions of meadow and wold and the uplifted desert of the Moor; they knew the riot of the storm and the thunder; they had marked the punctual progress of the months. And theirs, also, was that night so strange, that emotion so terrific, when through each emerald court there passed a presence at coming of late September. Day, indeed, banished the shadow and the sunshine stayed their fear; but a stain had brushed the whole forest and written a new thing there, whose name was death.

Now in wisps and canopies they leapt and fell, ruddy and pale. They flew by night or dropped heavily at the touch of still dawn's finger. The russet, the scarlet and the etiolate leaf, that had lived its little life in shadow, now came together and joined hands in a death dance; fell and flew and flitted and twisted in the gigantic breath of the autumnal equinox; gyrated upward on sudden whirlwinds in lonely places; and sinking at last to the earth, yielded up their treasure in the alembics of the latter rain.

Only beech leaves and oak leaves, like weak souls, clung to dead joy and parent boughs that knew them no more. And it seemed as though the brown spikes that held next year's glory, cried to them in the voice of the wind, "Depart, ye auburn shadows and cease your sobbing; for ye also have won your meed of life's feast from earth and sky. The spring and summer hidden in time are ours. Therefore vanish and haunt the cradle of life with images of death no more."

Upon the fringe of Devon's central waste, beneath the woods, where they extend between a river valley and the Moor above, two human mothers walked and talked together. Rachel Bolt was old and her grey hair and wrinkled forehead chimed with the season's fall and made

her a figure emblematic of the hour. But Avisa Pomeroy's life halted a while at middle age. She was rather a small woman, dark and full-bosomed, straight and sturdy of build, but inclined to stoutness. The expression of her face was very placid, yet the calm belonged rather to mind than body: it was of the intellect and not the physical habit. She was not strong and great physical evils haunted her, waited at hand and looked out from the darkness of her future.

Avisa showed neither joy nor sorrow while she listened to her older companion; but the bent, autumnal creature spoke fast, and happiness made her thin voice musical. By their mouths these women might have been judged. The younger's was firm to hardness, yet full in the lip; the older mother had a small mouth, a little fallen in from lack of teeth behind. But more than the shadowed weakness of age marked her lips. They seemed a fit organ for the hopeful, gentle words that issued from them. Her speech also betrayed her. That an old woman could be so sanguine concerning the future served to indicate how many storms of experience had beat upon her head in vain.

"Draw your shawl closer, Rachel," said the younger. "Great news without a doubt of it. Set down your faggot an' we'll pitch here a bit in the sun, sheltered from the wind. I'm glad I've met you."

Presently the mothers sat side by side while the elder talked. She was a widow and lived with one son at the moorland hamlet of Merivale. Her friend also dwelt close at hand. Avisa had just been to a neighbouring village and, returning homeward fell in with Mrs. Bolt gathering sticks along the wood.

Now the leaves danced round them, played at their feet, fell impartially on Mrs. Pomeroy's linen sunbonnet and the ancient black straw hat of Rachel. There was rain in the air and the October afternoon faded toward dusk.

"She've took him, and who could doubt she would? A very good girl, Avisa, but a very unhappy home. To marry my son, Samuel, will be a better fate than many young women can look for. I could have wished she was a thought more of a scholar; but Sam's clever enough for them both, come to think of it."

"Jill Wickett's a pretty girl and I hope from my heart she'll make Samuel a good wife."

"She will—she must. That man—though he is my own son, I say it—be chosen of the Lord if ever man was, Avisa! He'll have his store of blessings. Heaven knows him, like it knowed his father afore him."

Mrs. Pomeroy nodded. Her eyes were large and grey, and they looked gentler than her lips. In maidenhood they had seemed the very haunt of wondering innocence; but a little twinkle at the corner of that strong mouth had always belied them and still did so.

"'Tis very large-minded in you to take it thus," continued Rachel Bolt, "because well I know your boy, Ives, was set in that quarter, too, and naturally you'd have liked such a bowerly wife as Jill for him. But there 'tis: both couldn't have her, and my Samuel was the chosen."

This news, however, by no means troubled the younger mother. The fact meant a painful task presently, but she was accustomed to difficulties. Now she put the future aside and showed sympathy with her friend.

"Both couldn't have her, as you say, and 'twas more vitty that Samuel should. He's older by five or six year than my son—wiser, too."

"A headstrong young youth, your Ives, my dear."

"He is. So was I at his age. 'Tis not a bad thing altogether to want your own way. I like a colt to fight a bit when we're breaking him in. But better, my boy, don't marry yet a while."

"Not much more than a smurry to her back will the poor creature have when she comes to Samuel," continued

Mrs. Bolt. "They are terrible ill to do, the Wickett family. But I hope she'll be of a saving turn."

"I hope so, too. A fuzzy-poll of a maid; but a rare hard worker when in the humour, and very personable."

"She is. Sam have gived her a new green dress. You'll see her in it to worship next Sunday."

"An' very nice she'll look, I'm sure."

"The best of it all is, Avisa, that I shan't be parted too far from Samuel. Couldn't suffer it—more could he. Why, the dear chap wanted for me to live along with 'em! But 'no, no,' I said. 'Too wise for that.' I'll take thicky cottage on t'other side of the road: that's what I'll do."

"Be wiser still and go a bit further off, my dear."

"Samuel won't let me. Besides, there's not another house in Merivale I can have. Very lucky to get one just over against 'em."

"Look you take care, Rachel."

"Don't fear it. My love's my guide. Love be very witty, Avisa. I shall watch, but I shan't interfere, no more than the guardian angels do. All the same, he wanted me to stop with 'em, God bless him!"

"A loving son don't understand these things wholly. There's some people very restive of being watched—especially young married women. When I was a girl, I'd have gone mad to think as a pair of patient, old eyes was overlooking my life and seeing all my mistakes and silliness, and saying nought. Why, in my green youth, I often hated to think that God Almighty's Self never had His eye off me! I'd have suffered no human to watch."

She smiled at her maiden thoughts.

"I shall watch, however," repeated Rachel; "but never a word shall I say, well knowing the value of silence."

"You'll drive the girl silly."

"That wouldn't be a long journey. However, there I shall be—for Samuel's sake. And I'm not saying a word

against Jill neither. She'll soon learn from him. He'll think for her, same as I've thought for him—same as you do for your boy and girl."

"The strongest mind looks ahead the farthest," declared Avisa Pomeroy. "Childer can't see beyond their little to-morrows, so us must for 'em. And a many growed people can't neither. My son's not marriage-ripe, Rachel."

"And never will be, so long as he's that rash and reckless. Samuel tells me 'tis a pity the friends he makes."

"Samuel tells you the truth. We must wait and hope."

"Trust you for that."

"Ives be a slow learner. So was I. But come I gathered a bit of knowledge from life, it always stuck fast, Rachel."

"Sorrow's the best schoolmaster, I reckon."

"I don't say that. Happiness have taught me many things, too. My boy be stiff-necked and rebellious and passionate. But nobody as loves justice like him will go far wrong in the upshot. A curious bent of mind sometimes. When his little sister died—my third, you know—Ives, six year old he was then, missed her noise the night after, and axed my old mother where she was to. 'She've kissed God, dearie,' says the dear old soul in her fanciful way, and the boy sniffed. 'Poor Milly—she always hated kissing'—that was what he said about it."

"A good church goer, however. You must take consolation in that, Avisa."

"He goes to please me—an' look at the girls."

Mrs. Pomeroy's eyes pictured her boy at worship and twinkled with mingled love and amusement. But old Rachel Bolt was shocked.

"Samuel ban't like that. Never did he gaze at a female creature till Jill's bright hair and great red mouth burst upon him. 'Tis a fine thing for her family—her marrying a Bolt and such a man as Samuel. They be properly pleased about it, I hear."

"So they should be. Now I'll help you with your wood so far as my home. 'Tis something too big a bundle for your shoulders."

"Thank you kindly. You must know there ban't no call for me to gather sticks, and Sam often grumbles; but the habit is lifelong, and, just to be alone with my own thoughts, I often come out to do it."

They parted presently where Avisa dwelt, and the elder went slowly forward. She hardly heard the kindly wishes in her ears, for this great news filled her heart and made her selfish. Her son had been her life for many years. Now he was going to be the life of another. Therefore some fear shadowed the joy that she felt in seeing him joyful.

Avisa's mental attitude to the circumstance was exceedingly different. No regret marked it. She swept aside a passing feeling of surprise that Jill had chosen the simple and somewhat uninteresting Sam Bolt, when she might have had Ives Pomeroy; then she smiled at her own mother's heart because such a thought had risen; and then she ceased to smile and set her face firmly, almost grimly, to meet her boy.

It was his sister, however, who approached Avisa on her return home. At the door of Vixen Tor Farm, in Walla Valley, stood her daughter, and Lizzie Pomeroy's face swiftly showed that she, too, had heard the news. She was small and very neat, with an almost birdlike trimness of dress and person. Her face was bright and fair with round grey eyes like her mother's, though virginal and rather chill in their expression. But the coldness belonged to temperament and resulted from lack of imagination, not want of knowledge.

"Oh, mother, here's a pretty tantara!" she cried. "Ives be just back home from Merivale. That girl, Jill Wickett—she've taken Mrs. Bolt's son; and Ives be using language about it something shocking. And, though

I've kept his dinner hot all the afternoon, not a bite will he take."

Her mother did not answer, but entered the kitchen of Vixen Tor farmhouse, threw her bonnet on a settle, and then approached her boy.

He sat with his hands in his pockets on one side of the fire; while upon the other, old Jane Pomeroy, his dead father's mother, faced him. The young man's face was dark with passion and an expression almost malignant reigned upon it. He turned his black eyes on his mother. His hair was rather long and wet with perspiration.

In the momentary silence old Mrs. Pomeroy sighed audibly and rattled her wooden knitting-needles. Ives wore his cap at the back of his head, and his mother's first act was to take it off and brush the hair from his forehead with her hand.

Then he turned on her.

"If I thought you'd had any part in this, mother, I'd never see your face again—God judge me if I would!"

"I've had no part in it, Ives—no part in it beyond hoping for the right thing to happen. I won't say I'm sorry for this, because I'm not. You're long ways short of wife-old yet. But I'm mortal sorry for your sorrow, my son. 'Tis that I'm thinking on. I'm wondering——"

"I don't want none of that soft stuff. If you didn't do this, who did? Is it likely such a sheep-faced, sandy-headed fool as Bolt would have won her away from me single-handed? Somebody helped him, and if 'twasn't you, who was it?"

"You ought to know better than talk to mother like that!" flamed out Lizzie. "Always on your side as she is, and then, just because you're crossed——"

"'Crossed!'" he thundered out. "'Crossed!' Is that what you call it, you little fool? 'Crossed!' When a man's life is suddenly knocked all abroad and ruined

for evermore by a woman—when—— And you, with all you want, to preach. There, get out of my sight, you ignorant wretch, or I'll fling a knife at you!"

Lizzie set her lips hard, but tears came into her eyes.

"Don't—don't talk that terrible harsh, Ives," said his grandmother. "What do a cheel like her know about it? List to your mother. 'Tis a pity you don't oftener."

"I'll list to nobody," he said. "Tell me who've done it—that's what I want to know."

Avisa sat beside him and took his hand between hers. He snatched it away; then she took it again and he let it remain.

"I'll have it out with the man, whoever 'twas," he said.

"So you shall, boy. I know his name very well—an' you do, too."

"Speak it, then. I won't sleep this night till——"

"What was it you told us at dinner back last week, Ives?"

He reflected, then remembered.

"That me and she had a bit of a flare up about Samuel Bolt."

"And you said——?"

"I said what any man would say. I told her that if she thought she'd be happier with a poor, broken-winded fool like him, than with a chap like me, she's better go to him and be damned."

"With that you flung off from her."

"Yes, I did. I was sick of the subject. She was in a woman's mood and kept on praising the slack-twisted creature till 'twas all I could do to help boxing her ears. Wish I had now."

"When did you see her last?"

"'Pon Sunday after church. I went down so far as Ward Bridge along with her. And little enough she said. Then suddenly she axed, 'Be you going to say you'm

sorry, Ives?' And I said, 'What for?' Then she said, 'Last week, I should think.' And I said, ''Tis for you, not me, to say you'm sorry.' And she said, 'What a child you be still—doan't know no more about a woman than a cow. You only care for your silly, vain self, and that's the ugly truth about you.' 'Twasn't like I was going to stand that. So I had my say short and sharp, and then left her till she'd thought it over and comed to her senses. And no doubt she must needs ax somebody's advice; and who be that somebody? Tell me that."

Mrs. Pomeroy looked at him and still held his hand.

"You've answered your own question, my dear. She told you a lot of truth, Ives. 'Twas you and nobody else helped Samuel Bolt to get her."

"You say that!" he cried. "You—you can tell that silly nonsense!"

"Sober truth, Ives."

"If you ask me, I say you're well out of it—well out of it," declared Lizzie. Her emotion had passed and she had now grown angry. "A great, untidy, slammocking woman—below you every way. You ought to be thankful, instead of raving at your own mother and sister like a lunatic."

He glared at her, but did not answer.

Then his mother rose and opened the oven door and took out a dish that stood within.

"Come—eat your meat. 'Tis no sense going hungry for it," she said.

He started up violently and used foul language.

"Curse the lot of you—narrow, hard-hearted, frozen-up creatures that you be! You talk so wise, and me robbed of the only thing in the world I cared about. Precious comfort—the likes of you—to a miserable man. But I'll go my own way—to hell if I choose. And 'twill be your fault—yours, mother, as much as any—for you never liked

her and never helped me to win her. And now—be damned to everybody! I don't care what becomes of any living soul on God's earth no more. And I'll be free, mark me, from this day—free to do what I please and think what I please. So now you know, mother!"

He took his cap, rose and went out of the house; while Mrs. Pomeroy bent and brushed up the dirt that his boots had left by the hearth.

"He'll be the death of us yet," said Lizzie mournfully; but her mother shook her head and smiled. She was looking after Ives.

"Don't think it," she answered. "'Tis the other way: we'll be the life of him."

"How you can take it so easy, mother! Why, he's been drinking—you know he has as well as I do."

"He has," admitted Mrs. Pomeroy. "Poor, dear silly boy. Drinking—yes. When I was a maid such things happened to me, Lizzie, that I'd have got drunk, too, sometimes—if I'd dared."

"Mother!"

Still Avisa's eyes were set on the open door. A strange look rested in them—whimsical, yet withal wistful, too.

"How like him I was once," she said.

"Never—never!" cried her daughter. "You so patient, so gentle—never vexed with man or mouse—always ready to make excuses for us. Like Ives!"

"There's a lot of difference betwixt four-and-twenty and fifty, my dear. If you'd known your mother when she was your age, Lizzie, you'd have said she wasn't a good companion for you."

"Mother!" the girl gasped again, and her eyes filled with amazement.

Even the aged woman by the fire protested.

"Jimmery, what'll you say next, Avisa?" she asked.

The face of Lizzie's mother twinkled and, to those who understood, might have helped to explain her words.

For a moment every line of her countenance spoke of joy as she looked back; then a cloud fell upon it and she shook her head.

"A very headstrong, ownself maiden, I warn 'e. Hard to please—too selfish to please. Granny here forgets, but I remember; and 'tis well for you children that I do."

She went over to Mrs. Pomeroy, the elder.

"Ives be more mine than his father's—as yet," she said.

"Very unlike his father, thank God," answered the grandmother of Ives. "No more like my son than sense be like foolishness."

"A great soul he had," admitted the widow. "A calm and a thoughtful man."

"And ban't you calm and thoughtful, mother?" asked Lizzie.

"Perhaps—now. But 'twas life taught me. It comed from outside, not from inside. Life—life rubbed down my nature—like the skidded wheel rubs down the road."

"And father?"

"Your father *was* my life—patience made alive, Lizzie."

The old woman nodded in the corner.

"You never said a truer word, Avisa; and all that's best in these children comed from my boy."

"I know it. His unchanging patience with men—always the same."

"Always—from his youth up."

"And when he chose me, folk said 'twas the steadfast stone choosing the butterfly."

Lizzie stood up for her mother.

"You made him the happiest man in the world, anyway, for I've heard Mr. Toop and many another say so. And well you might, a lovely, darling dear like you!"

"The loss—the loss—to you and your brother," mourned Jane Pomeroy. "His salvation would his father have

been to Ives; but the Lord had need of my son. 'Twas that thought kept me sane when he went."

"And his babies had need of me," mused the younger mother. "Maybe 'twas that thought kept me sane. But we wasn't far off from mad women—you and me—till God A'mighty saw and pitied the pair of us."

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSEHOLD OF POMEROY

LIKE a child in its mother's arms, the little homestead of the Pomeroys reposed on the southward slope of the Vixen and cuddled there beneath the immense rock-masses of that tor. No nobler pile of granite shall be found upon Dartmoor. It towers gradually to its crown by rampart and bastion; a happy relation of parts has chanced to weld the three main divisions into one perfect whole, and Vixen rises, the very impersonation of strength, solidity and settled purpose, to be a landmark for time, the haunt of nocturnal birds, an emblem of mystery and of power. It has been likened to the Sphinx; ancient antiquaries imagined rock-basins for lustration and sacrifice upon its peaks; tradition records that in days remote the tor was used as an observatory and the passage of planets and stars studied therefrom.

None now ever scrambled up its ascents or stood upon its summit but Ives Pomeroy. Lizzie in her short-skirted time had done the like with help from him; but her days of clambering in the heart of the Vixen were past, and she marvelled, looking back, to remember them. Ives had the tor to himself and still delighted in its secret places, still stole thither to think and smoke, still found some pleasure in his dead boyhood's dreams of great sieges and heroic deeds. Sometimes the tor had been a robbers' castle and he captained the desperate gang; led them upon neighbouring villages; raided the flocks of common men; defied the law and made his name a terror to the countryside, a secret joy to the maidens. Sometimes the Vixen had stood for a ship, and on such occasions a close

observer might have seen a small black flag fluttering among the ivy aloft—a flag with some white emblem upon it intended to represent skull and cross-bones. The skipper's pirate horde would then sink neighbouring tors with eighteen-pounder carronades; and every luckless soul walked the plank, while the Vixen would shake out her sails once more and depart slowly through a sea of blood. So his young, fiery heart built up an environment of riot and adventure; but when knowledge and life killed the first flood of imagination, when he left the village school and began to learn his father's business of crops and flocks, he still carried love of adventure into adolescence. Then the romance of sex was substituted for his boyhood's desire towards buccaneering on land and sea.

Vixen marked the red-letter days of his life. He remembered the proud moment when his strength got him to the top. He recollected each discovery of some new wonder. The clefts and crannies and secret places were all known to him. He had names for every boulder and cave. His sister had shared the mysteries and been his humble handmaid in many an imaginary deed of death and daring; but now she had forgotten all about those private names and wicked performances. He knew it was natural that she should do so; yet vaguely despised her for growing up so quickly. Over his pipe, in some shadowy niche only seen by the sun and the jackdaws, he often retraced the old fancies still, and never laughed at them.

Now, striding passionately into gloaming of night, Ives turned by instinct to his giant playmate, crept inside a little penthouse from whose crevices and clefts lolled dying pennywort, and flung himself down to reflect on this sudden stroke of fate. He lighted his pipe presently, and the evening wind cooled his head and lifted the fumes of liquor that still hung heavy there.

Beneath him lay the farm and its immediate cultivated lands. A few small fields subtended the kitchen garden.

Then plantations of larch and pine sank to the water. Walla ran near enough to be heard at all times, and her murmur came to Ives through the thinning gold of the larches. About the dwelling of the Pomeroys stood a fir or two, and, behind it, the Moor stretched in a rugged coomb upward. At this season autumnal furzes still flamed and rich mosaic of weathered granite with warm tints of herbage dappled the waste. A stream ran through the midst, a whitethorn or two arose beside it; and above them stood the "Windystone"—a venerable cross believed to mark some vanished pack-saddle track, or the path followed from monastery to monastery by mediæval monks.

A feature of the Pomeroys' homestead was an oak coppice, that stood on the opposite bank of the river and covered five acres of the hillside. It represented a rich harvest, though the crop was reaped but four times in a century. Every five-and-twenty years the vigorous young forest growth fell at springtime and gave varied treasures of poles, bark, faggots, and charcoal. From fifteen to twenty pounds an acre accrued from the cutting of the coppice; the rind went to the tanners; the best poles were appropriated for building, fencing, and hurdling, the brushwood commanded half-a-crown a faggot, and the charcoal, sold at the char-heaps, was worth two shillings a bushel. Next year would see the coppice felled; for among the last things that Avisa's husband had spoken to her on his deathbed was one concerning it. "Mind," said he, "that if you'm spared, you cut the copse-wood in the year Ives be turned five-an'-twenty; an' if all's well with him an' Lizzie, I'd wish for the money, up to one hundred pound, to be divided betwixt 'em as a gift from the father."

His wife promised, and now the time of performance had nearly come.

An owl glided from somewhere above the head of Ives and departed silently about her business. Lights twin-

kled out of the farm windows beneath him, and he heard the rain begin to fall. But he was dry and warm in his holt. Long ago he had thrown down a load of fern there for his own comfort. Now he turned, pursued his thoughts, brooded revenge, and lighted another pipe.

This man's father belonged to the yeoman class, but lacked education or ambition. Honourable, upright, obscure and without a grain of imagination, he lived his days and followed exactly in the footsteps of his ancestors. They had farmed at the Vixen for five generations and been content. None had made an effort to improve the place; none had ever aspired to acquire it as a family possession, though successive landlords often tempted them to do so. The Pomeroy race in this branch produced no enterprising spirit, no soul hungry to advance or to rise, not one who would take possible risk for probable gain.

Then came Ives Pomeroy and married Avisa; and their son, Ives the second, promised to break the tradition. He was not a man of middle courses, and he continued to remain very young for his age. It appeared unlikely that he would succeed largely, and most who knew him foretold actual failure; but for the present he went much untried, because his mother was content to hold the helm, as she had done since her husband's death. Ives knew his business, and understood that the salvation of the moorland farmer is the Moor. He grazed, therefore, but he cultivated little. He was lazy and avoided responsibility. People, including his grandmother, wondered where he had come from; only his mother found it written in the book of her own youth. Lizzie, on the contrary, was a true Pomeroy: methodical, trustworthy, diffident, lacking in self-reliance. The brother and sister had been close friends in childhood and were only separated by two years; but now Lizzie put away childish things and was as serious-minded as a maiden of two-and-twenty can sometimes be. She lacked humour and Ives alarmed her.

He also angered her by his sweeping generalities, by his impatience, by his amorous attitude to other girls, by his openly expressed contempt of her caution and secondhand wisdom. For Lizzie copied her mother and strove to be like her; she also copied her sweetheart, a village schoolmaster; but the boy copied nobody. Yet he brought her own youth to his mother's mind every week of her life. In the light of her young days she read him; and since marriage with a sober-minded and stolid spirit had been the turning point in her own career, she looked forward to that great event for Ives and trusted Providence to save the situation. Old Mrs. Pomeroy found little to admire in her grandson and often regretted that he was not more like his father. Round this bygone yeoman's memory had settled great legends of virtue and wisdom. But Lizzie and Ives were only little children when their father died, and had no personal recollection of him. It became them, therefore, to take on trust the picture painted by a loving wife and doting mother. Lizzie believed with her whole heart. Ives secretly doubted whether any man so good, so wise, so great as his father was reported to have been, had ever existed in reality.

Two hinds, an old man and a young one, completed the establishment at Vixen Tor Farm. Emanuel Codd, the elder, was a soured and suspicious peasant who earned his money, but never allowed that any other labouring man on Dartmoor honestly did so. The younger, Rupert Johnson, happily for his peace of mind, possessed neither nerves nor pride. He pleased his mistress and contented Ives. More he did not seek to do. Emanuel's ceaseless grumbling left his fellow-labourer indifferent and unconcerned. Indeed, the condition of Mr. Codd's mind was chronic and the disease of distraction had spread through it like a cancer. He distrusted human nature from every possible point of view; and humanity retorted by detesting him. This old bachelor had been head man of

the farm since the father of Ives Pomeroy died. It was his custom to give notice about every six months, and Mrs. Pomeroy always fell in with the suggestion and expressed a conventional regret that he must be leaving them at last. There the matter ended. Of late, however, one or two sharp scenes had fallen out between Emanuel and the son of the house. Mr. Codd once hinted at a poaching scandal, and openly deplored that the name of Pomeroy should be uttered along with that of certain notorious local celebrities. Ives, in language pointed by anger, had thereupon trounced the veteran cruelly, and Mr. Codd, by way of retort, instantly gave warning in his most impressive manner. His master's riotous laughter further insulted him. He did not go, but relations were strained at the present moment, and without actually naming dates, the head man declared on all possible occasions that, after the felling of the coppice during the coming year, he should retire. He also openly named the pension that he expected to receive as the reward of forty-five years' service.

Ives, to mark the height of his misery, stopped in his lair on the Vixen until nearly midnight. Then, guessing that the farm must be asleep and that he might descend to the details of eating a big supper without human eye to note the sordid, necessary deed, crept home again.

A lamp burned low in the kitchen and a scrap of paper lay beside it. How well he knew those little notes. He glanced at it and read:

"Supper in the oven. Good-night, dear heart. Mother."

Then he twisted up the message and flung it into the dying fire, as he had a thousand like it.

Sleep held the dwelling. A few blackbeetles rustled away as he turned up the light; his dog had heard him and barked on her chain at the rear of the house. The

kitchen walls were covered with a wash of pale apricot colour and a clock ticked against one of them. Presently it struck twelve. But the noisy gong had been removed during his father's last illness and never restored. The hammer fell on nothing and made only the gentlest sound. The clock purred the hour of midnight rather than struck it.

Ives felt exceedingly sorry for himself, but hunger was at least as pressing as grief. He made a mighty meal, then went to bed and soon escaped his miseries in dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER III

"MOLESKIN" ON WOMAN

After Walla has fallen from her fountains near the cradle of her greater sister, Tavy, in midmost Moor, she winds southwest and passes downward under Mis Tor into the wooded glens beneath the Vixen. But, before she leaves the waste, a bridge of grey stone spans her growing stream, and road and river meet at right angles. Down the great slope eastward this highway falls, then upward climbs again under the triple crown of the Staple Tors; and just beyond the bridge, extended straggling by the path, like a row of tired folk tramping home after a revel, shall be seen the few cottages of Merivale. Northward, separated from the village by moorland, and its own surrounding fields, the farm of "Stone Park" stands naked, treeless and solitary; southward, where Walla flows from the upland austerities into a gentler domain of forest and arable land, there extend regions of cultivation with their dwellings in the midst.

All round about upon this day, the stone monarchs of the land thrust sombre heads upward into a stormy sky. Beyond Great Mis Tor something of the central desolation might be seen swept with fog-banks; and the river, in spate from heavy rain, cried aloud through the valley.

Low, grey and black, with whitewashed faces and tar-pitched roofs, Merivale stood and faced the south. No special feature marked this uneven row of habitations threaded up the hill, save where, in the midst, from a square building of two storeys, a signboard hung and swung backwards and forwards at the thrust of the wind. Newly painted upon it appeared a red-faced trio of gen-

tlemen in scarlet coats and shiny black hats. They smiled at the world with an air of invincible good nature and high spirits; but they were hopelessly out of drawing and the crude colour of their coats stared like a wound against the far-flung, silver-grey sobriety of the time and place. Above them shone a legend in gold: *The Jolly Huntsmen;* beneath them, in black letters, it was proclaimed that the brothers Toop were licensed to sell tobacco, snuff, and spirits.

The inn bar, at this moment in mid-afternoon, presented no feature of interest, save a young woman who stood behind it rinsing glasses. Three tourists had just departed and for a few minutes Ruth Rendle remained alone. Very little of the professional barmaid appeared in her. Indeed, she was new to the work, and had lived with her cousins, the proprietors of the inn, no more than six months.

Chance suddenly threw Ruth penniless on the world; and chance ordained that the brothers Toop should lose their barmaid by marriage at the same moment. Therefore they offered their kinswoman a home in exchange for service. She accepted gladly, came from East Devon to the Moor, did the new work as well as she could, and soon made more friends than she desired.

She was a slim, dark-faced girl of twenty-one, with black hair and rather heavy brows. The expression of her face was, however, lightened by her manner of drawing the hair from it abruptly. She wore no fringe, but curled her locks in one great coil at the back of her head. Her forehead was rather high, and critical maidens held that Ruth spoilt herself by this display of it; but she was not vain, albeit as Mr. Peter Toop always said, there was no need for her to show that she had brains by revealing her brow; because one need only to speak to her and the brains would appear. His brother, Joel Toop, agreed with him.

Ruth was not much of a talker, but she listened well, and by that accomplishment, atoned for the lack of ready and sparkling repartee deemed desirable in her present occupation. Men liked to talk to her. A man came in and began talking to her now.

He was tall, thin, and wiry. He wore riding-breeches and slapped his leg with a hunting crop while he addressed the listener. A hatchet-shaped and rather handsome face belonged to him, but his blue eyes shone cold, his straw-coloured beard and moustache were rough and ill-cared for. Matthew Northmore's voice was pleasant and his intonation clean, strong, and little marked by any trace of the vernacular speech. He had not come to drink. Indeed, he was an abstainer from alcohol, and the brothers Toop occasionally considered the question and wondered whether a hint might be dropped upon the subject.

"A delicate-minded man would do something, if 'twas only lemonade," declared Joel, and Peter concurred.

The brothers were not, however, blind to Northmore's attention. Indeed, personal interest quickened their observation where Ruth was concerned, and they, as well as other people, including the girl herself, knew very well what drew an unsociable and lonely spirit so often to the bar of *The Jolly Huntsmen.*

Never until the arrival of Miss Rendle had the master of Stone Park thrust himself into company. He lived aloof, farmed his hungry acres, grazed his herds, and found pleasure in fox-hunting. He was thirty-eight years old, reserved and shy. Now a thing common enough to the lonely soul not yet turned of forty, had befallen him. Women figured but little in his life, and he had never loved one until the voice and direct gaze and subtle quality of Ruth combined to waken his heart and save it from sexual atrophy. He was in love, and the passion, feeding on virgin material, swelled swiftly to a fierce fire. A man extremely sensitive until now, the new emotion made

him face his fellows with a blunt indifference that amazed himself. He knew that they laughed and talked about him behind his back; and such a thought in any other relation would have made him shrink, shudder, call on the hills to cover him; but since Ruth Rendle was the matter, he scoffed at secret criticism, pushed to her side fearlessly before all eyes, and despite many an open wink and whisper fought with all his immense vigour and despite his immense inexperience to win her.

"'Tis very good of you, I'm sure," declared Ruth. As she spoke, she stroked the breasts of two snipe that Matthew had brought her.

"Don't you let those old men eat them," he said. "I know how greedy fond they are of game. But these are for you."

She nodded.

"I'll remember."

"Hounds meet at the Windystone on Friday fortnight. Is there a chance of you running out for an hour?"

"Not a chance. We shall be very busy before the meet, and maybe again after. You be going hunting?"

"Yes, I suppose so. 'Tis my only pleasure. At least it was—till——"

She kept silence and caressed the dead birds. Then she spoke, since he added nothing to his broken sentence, but only looked down at her hand.

"Do you ever read books of an evening?"

"Now and again. But not often—not much of a scholar, I'm afraid."

"More am I; yet I'm very fond of books."

He scented a possibility.

"What sort of books?"

"You'll laugh. I like rhymes."

"Do you now! Whoever would have thought it? I believe I've gotten a fat old volume of verses somewhere.

'Twas my sister's. She left it behind her when she went to be married; and, seeing that now she've got a house full of little sticky children and a husband with a cruel bad temper, 'tis odds she won't want it again."

"You might lend it to me, Mr. Northmore."

"I will, Miss Rendle, and glad to. I'll bring it up to-night."

"Next time you're coming be quite soon enough."

"Next time I'm coming will be to-night," he said. Then he paused, then he tried clumsily to get conversation on to more personal topics.

"I—I do wish, if I may make so bold——" he began, and stopped.

"Yes?"

"I wish—I——"

His desire was never uttered, for two men entered the bar and Ruth turned to them.

One had passed middle age, but his eyes were still young and bright. Laughter made a home therein, yet heavy brows overhung them and the left eyelid half hid the iris. William Cawker had used his sight through the hours of darkness for so many years, that an eternal frown wrinkled the brows, and this physical accident belied a geniality that beamed from the rest of his face. He was an unprincipled, kind-hearted man. He declared openly that he had walked the broad road for so many years that the narrow one had ceased to be possible for him. His master-passion was sport, and it took the form of poaching. Indeed he considered this the highest branch of sport, since it held a salt lacking from any form of legitimate slaughter. He belonged to the old order of predatory rascals, and had learned his business from a father whose leg had been broken in a man-trap. Nobody ever called this grey-whiskered, and humorous person Cawker. He was known as "Moleskin" within his radius, and a mangy waistcoat of that material which seemed part of

him, accounted for the nickname. For the rest he went habitually in the colours of earth, and his great pockets were stained with blood of bird, beast, and fish. None could remember him in a black coat. It was known that Moleskin had been to prison in his earlier days, and all men believed that he had earned similar chastisement on many a subsequent occasion; but with age he had perfected his craft, and gamekeepers and water-bailiffs cursed in vain. He enjoyed his life—a condition not shared by the bedridden wife and careworn daughter who completed his household. They lived two miles from Merivale, in a cottage of four rooms; and the women found themselves anxious and miserable above the common lot, for their man's days and nights were one long battle with order, honesty, and law. So far he had conquered, but he grew older, and Mrs. Cawker, with a large experience in poachers and their inevitable end, wished that the climax would come and her suspense terminate.

Moleskin went his way with unfailing cheerfulness of spirit. He made a good deal of money, but was always in debt to those who would trust him. Here and there certain people permitted him to pay in kind, and the brothers Toop, albeit they mourned his unrighteous ways, would usually let a brace of snipe or an occasional salmon rub off a part of his formidable score in the taproom. Others did the like. Everybody deplored the presence of this malefactor, yet everybody felt that, for once, he probably told the truth when he declared himself beyond hope of regeneration. Meantime most people enjoyed Moleskin's company and found themselves the merrier if not the better for it.

With the poacher came Ives Pomeroy, and it was significant of their steady patronage that Ruth, without asking either, poured out the liquor each desired. Rum was Moleskin's invariable stimulant: he never partook of anything else. As for the youth, he drank beer.

"Put your coin back," said Mr. Cawker. "I'm standing to-day and the money's got feathers on it."

He set down a double-barrelled breech-loader, thrust his hand into a roomy pocket, and produced a brace of golden plover. The blood was still bright upon them. They had just flown afar to win this cruel welcome.

Matthew Northmore was interested.

"You got some then?" he asked. "I saw a flight after dawn this morning, wheeling aloft. Then they faded away, flying high, and I judged they was bound for the north."

"You judged wrong," said Moleskin. "I seed 'em, too, and guessed they meant to stop in the bogs down under White Tor. And I guessed right—according to my custom in the matter of such things. I'll take a wing feather or two for peel flies, miss. And mind you tell Peter Toop that the birds be worth two shilling apiece—not a halfpenny less."

"You old liar!" said Northmore. "Two shilling a pair to Plymouth market any day."

"No, no, farmer. A liar I may be in and out—as we all are—more shame to us—even you. But not over a solemn matter like my debt to *The Jolly Huntsmen*. Four shilling should be took off—or say three and six, and allow for interest."

Ives talked to Ruth Rendle. He had still but one subject of conversation, though the matter of the engagement was now a fortnight old. He had wearied most ears with his wrongs, and been more egotistical than usual under his unutterable loss.

"As good as tokened, mind you. She'd promised, if anything short of words can promise. The thing was done—planned out to the very end."

"Then she flickered out in a green dress to church; I'm told," said Moleskin. "Ha—ha—ha! Not so green

as you was, when you heard poor Sammy Bolt had gived it to her out of his savings. Well, well, there's as good fish in Walla as I've ever catched there. Ban't there, miss?"

"You may be well out of it," said Northmore. But his tone showed no friendship for Ives. Indeed, he held the young man in some scorn. To bleat thus about a jilting made him contemptuous.

"Very likely—though I didn't know as you pretended to understand the women," retorted Ives. "Perhaps Miss Ruth here be putting you up to a thing or two?"

Matthew shrugged his shoulders, avoided the girl's face and himself asked a question.

"Who are you to call her 'Miss Ruth'? More civil if you said 'Miss Rendle,' I should think."

Ives laughed.

"I'll call her the Queen of England, if she likes. She understands me very well. Don't you teach me how to treat the girls. I know a damned sight more about 'em than an old bachelor like you do, anyway."

The farmer restrained an inclination to answer with his horsewhip. He turned his back on Pomeroy and spoke to Ruth.

"I'll bring you the book this evening," he said. Then he left the bar.

Moleskin winked over his tumbler at Ives.

"Had him there, my bold boy. Couldn't answer that, because he knowed 'twas true. Rather a tough bird to begin love-making, eh? Lord, I feel myself a young man when I look at his long-jawed, solemn features. Don't you lose your heart too quick, miss—else you may be sorry when 'tis too late."

Ruth looked uncomfortable and pained. She picked up the birds and departed through a door at the back of the bar. Left without an eye upon him, Moleskin swiftly stole two boxes of matches, half a lemon, and a

little glass sugar-crusher. Then he turned to Ives and flattered him.

"You understand 'em, almost so well as I did in my young days. Women be a noble branch of larning, and they'm like reading, or writing, or figures—to some they come as easy as pat; others, do what they will, can't get no forwarder. I loved 'em from the time I was fourteen, and done very well in my quiet way. But there's some men be always dunces—like that sandy chap as have just gone out the bar. Near forty and don't know no more than the dead how to set about 'em! Wasted his youth, he did—now 'tis too late for him to make any sort of figure among the females."

"Nobody's going to look at an ugly, hard-voiced, hard-eyed fool like him," declared Ives.

"Ban't that: there's no male living that can't find a market somewhere, owing to the laws of supply and demand. But he mustn't hope high now. This here bowerly maiden—she won't never look at him if I understand anything about 'em. She'd rather take me if I was free! Or even you, glumpy and glowering and sulky as you be."

"I see nothing in her for that matter."

"I see a lot. She's the right sort—good moss for some stone she'll be. You don't often get silence without sense. One more little un, my dear."

Ruth had come back and he addressed her; while Ives returned to his own wrongs.

"To throw me over because I told her the truth! She shall live to repent it, anyhow, that I will swear. And so shall he—though he's not worth powder and shot. What would you do, Moleskin, if it had happened to you?"

"I can tell you in a word," answered the poacher. "For that matter it did happen to me—more than once. A girl here and there threw me over—I must confess it; and for that matter I throwed a few of them over, too. So that was all fair and square, profit and loss.

Then comed a very fine, fat, dear creature called Daisy Blee—one of they Chagford Blees—all dead now but her. A noble piece she was, and would be my wife to-day, only for the changes and chances of life. I got misunderstood just about three months afore we was to be married, and the justices took a wrongful view, poor toads—along of reading the game laws without any understanding—and I was sent to Exeter. I suppose they thought I wanted a close time, like the birds and fish. And I got it, and had to rest from my labours all through one winter. And when I came out Daisy Blee wouldn't know me. Besides, she was on with the Chagford postman. A good wife she made the man, and I often go in and talk over her girlhood when I'm down that way. No malice on either side. With all my faults, I can say this for myself: I never felt an unkind thought to anything that went in petticoats, and never shall. Here's to 'em all!"

He beamed and watched the sex; then he took up his gun and patted his bulging pockets.

"Three brace more here, as have got to go to Tavistock, so I'd best to be moving," he said.

At this moment, however, Peter Toop appeared.

"Stop, will 'e?" said Peter. "I see the first golden plover be come in. Us'll wet the day, unless you've had enough."

"And thank you, Peter, I'm sure," answered the poacher. "Good birds and fairly plump for after flight. And, as to having enough, that's a state I never allow myself to reach, as you know."

Mr. Toop was bald, but he atoned for this lack by a flowing and handsome beard. The colour of it was grizzled, and his moustache had been stained to a brilliant yellow under his nose by a habit of taking snuff in large quantities. He was rather short, strong, and sturdy. His eyes were bright, his nose was made coarse with snuff

and veined with purple. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles and spoke with great deliberation.

"I be comforting this poor blighted lover here," explained Moleskin, and Mr. Toop showed interest.

"Ah—I've heard about it. 'Tis a very trying thing to be crossed in love, Pomeroy. I'm sorry for you with all my heart. If it happened to me, I should—I don't know. I should certainly never get over it."

Peter turned his gold-rimmed glasses towards Ruth in a very significant manner, which she failed to observe.

"You be like the caterpillar—haven't got no use for courting," said Mr. Cawker; but Peter Toop would not allow this.

"Plenty of time—plenty of time," he answered. "Wise men don't rush into it nowadays. They wait for the right partner to come along. You'll see me married yet—if only for my brother's sake."

Moleskin winked at Ives.

"All the same, you mustn't let it go too long. I wouldn't be so rude as to hint at your age, Peter; but we'm none of us growing younger, and the juice dries up terrible quick in some men's bones after they pass fifty."

"A bald head's often a deception," declared Mr. Toop. "You'll frequently find it along with a young disposition."

He looked at Ruth impressively.

"Now my brother, Joel," continued the innkeeper, "though he may look a bit younger than me, is really years and years older—both in mind and body. I'm a regular right down boy compared to him. But my wife, when I take her, will find me straight as a line and faithful and high-minded—all that I can promise any woman."

"You'm a treasure for somebody—such a lion of virtue as you be!"

"Virtue I have got," admitted Peter. "And a very tender way with the female sex. Always felt a remarkable modesty come over me afore them. Couldn't look

at 'em without my eyes watering till I was getting on past twenty year old."

"'Twas my mouth watered, not my eyes," said the bold Moleskin.

"My great habit of blushing up to the roots of my hair made the hair go—so a barber once told me," continued Peter. "But I feel a wonderful reverence for 'em. A man like you—so gay and free and deep as the dark in your knowledge of some sort of women, can't understand the high line I take."

Mr. Cawker laughed.

"You take a devilish high line, you do! Such a high line that you've been able to get on very comfortable without 'em, ever since you had no more use for your mother's bosom. A bachelor's an insult to the whole female sex in my opinion. Now me and Ives here be quite different. Gay or free or not, they'm our life's blood—at least they was. Of course now—the past is past with me; still I think like young un. But to hear you—Lord! a female prude's a dashing, dangerous customer compared to a man like you!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Toop. "I won't have that. A prude is the last thing I am—far from it."

The poacher smiled at his indignation.

"Listen to him now! If that ban't like all you good people—men and women," cried Mr. Cawker. "You ought to rejoice in the name of prude; yet when it comes to the point, no matter how highly proper you be, you all grow angered at it as if 'twas impertinent to call you so nice and good and vartuous."

"I know why, too," declared Ives. "Because, under their cant, they be men and women like everybody else. 'Tis only chaps who haven't got the pluck to dash at the girls, and only girls who don't get the chance to play a bit with the men, pretend all that silly drivel."

Moleskin roared with laughter.

"Never heard truth better put," he said. "This here vartue be a habit of mind, like church-going be a habit of body. But if you tell 'em they be so pure and high-minded, they take it for a left-hand compliment, and would much rather you thought they knowed a bit, too, and had had their adventures with the best!"

Mr. Toop shook his head.

"Your opinions was always outrageous and always will be," he said.

Then Moleskin departed, Peter disappeared, and Ives was left with Ruth Rendle. At last he talked himself tired and invited her to speak. She made a few timid and sympathetic remarks as to his disappointment; but they did not interest him, and he went his way.

After he had gone Ruth stood quite still for a while, then came to herself and smiled at her own thought. She had heard little of his grievances, and while she looked into young Pomeroy's frowning face had been wondering what was the colour of his eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE BROTHERS TOOP

Some mystery attached to the brothers Toop. In most affairs of life they were open as the day, and each pursued his dual occupation with energy and success. Peter was a publican and undertaker; Joel shared the duties and the profits of *The Jolly Huntsmen*, while, in addition, he kept pigs and poultry upon an extensive scale. They lived together at the inn, and Joel conducted his operations on the spot. His ducks and geese waddled daily to their haunts in the river; his swine dwelt in styes behind the public-house; but Peter's mournful business, as became it, was sequestered from the general eye. He employed two men, and his shop lay in a corner of Merivale behind the cottages.

The mystery concerned their ages, and upon this subject they differed. Each, when the other was not present, declared himself the younger; each professed himself by many years less elderly than he appeared; and each regarded marriage as a matter in the near future for himself, but declared that his brother now approached confirmed bachelorhood. Joel openly regretted the growing ravages of time as exhibited upon the person of Peter, and Peter mourned and shook his head to note how fast Joel went down the hill. Between themselves they never discussed the matter; but, when apart, each dilated upon the subject and took it for granted that his hearers were with him. As a matter of fact they might have been near of an age, and that age sixty-five or a little more. Peter was bald, Joel had grey hair; Peter was stout and ener-

getic, Joel was thin and active; Peter wore glasses and Joel needed them not; but against his brother's naked head and short sight, Joel had to set a chronic cough and gouty rheumatism. They were attached to one another and permitted no criticism from the outer world.

And now into their busy lives had come an object of immense significance in the shape of Ruth Rendle. With doubt and fear they invited her to join them, for the prospect of a young woman in the house rendered both uneasy; but Ruth at one-and-twenty proved herself more self-contained and staid than her predecessor of forty, who was now married to an Okehampton green-grocer. Ruth, though a silent woman, proved the soul of sense and prudence. She lacked that leaven of levity which Joel held desirable in a barmaid; yet, on the other hand, as Peter pointed out, she possessed gifts that were not only higher than a ready tongue, but which really paid better in the long run. The regular customers liked her, and, as time went on, her kinsmen both became enamoured of her.

They were men of business and realized what saving of time must result from the courting of a person who lived under their own roof; the disparity of age did not strike them, and for some months neither had the least idea that the other shared his ambition. Both appreciated the obvious advantages accruing to penniless Ruth; each in secret wondered what the other would make of it when he heard the news; and each, with a high opinion of the girl's common sense, felt tolerably hopeful. Joel, however, was far the more sanguine. They kept their secret intentions very carefully to themselves; but, since Peter and Joel were both acute and observant men, each presently discovered the situation with respect to his brother; each detected the other in little gallantries and lover-like acts. They brought Ruth presents; they insisted on taking her for drives; the position began to

be difficult for her, and sometimes in weak moments, after Joel's methodical attentions had been more than usually arduous, or Peter's warm heart had led him to extravagant lengths, the woman's mind looked round wildly for any possible channel of escape.

In public, and even before Ruth herself, Peter and Joel debated matrimony with good appetite. Marriage was indeed the favourite subject of their leisure, and if one mentioned it, the other was always ready to join the discussion.

There came a Sunday night when both descanted on the glories of the married state as they walked home from church with Mrs. Pomeroy, Mr. Codd, Ruth, and Ives. The Toops were strict Church of England men, and Peter undertook the duties of vicar's warden at Sampford Spiney, a neighbouring village where they worshipped.

Ives and Miss Rendle walked ahead, while Avisa went between the brothers.

"Pull your comforter well about your chest, Joel," said Peter. "The air strikes cold coming out into it."

"Thank you, thank you, Peter," answered the other, swift to scent a challenge. "And you walk gingerly, my dear. This road's a bit rough for your eyes after dark."

"You must soon be thinking of marrying, you two men," declared Mrs. Pomeroy, familiar with their favourite topic.

Both instantly answered, and from the clatter of their voices the slow, determined tones of Peter finally emerged, for Joel began to cough.

"What you say is full of sense, as usual. It is time we began to think about it—high time. Here's three good, money-making things—the hotel, the pig and poultry farm, and—my business, all to be handed down to the next generation, and no next generation coming on to hand 'em down to."

Joel, knowing that his weaker voice could not hold its own with Peter's louder and deeper organ, fell back upon Emanuel Codd. He dropped to the rear out of earshot and pursued the subject, though to no sympathetic listener.

"You see, Codd, as the older man, 'tis for Peter to take the first step, and I'm only waiting for him to do it. Some sensible creature of middle age is what he wants, if he is to marry at all. No young person would do for him now. He'll be needing a nurse, poor old chap, in ten years or so. It cuts me to the heart to see how blind he gets. And he won't go to the watchmaker's and buy a new strength of spectacles, because he thinks 'twould be a sign of age! However, if he don't marry, I must. 'Twill be my task to raise up a few nephews and nieces for Peter, and I really must set about it."

Codd smiled sourly to himself, but the darkness concealed his amusement.

"Your brother always says that he's got the pull of you by years. You'm a pair, if you ax me. What d'you want to marry for, and raise up brats to break your hearts, and get tangled up with women when you ought to be thinking of your graves?—There! Did you see that?"

He broke off suddenly and pointed to a man who passed them in the dim light.

"Good-night, Moleskin," said Joel Toop.

"Good-night, good-night, neighbours," cried Mr. Cawker; then he vanished into the darkness.

"Did you mark what he had under his arm?" asked Codd viciously.

"A cabbage or two, I think."

"Yes—and whose garden did they come out of? Little enough that man pays for green stuff. To eat a bite he hadn't stolen would be like meat without salt to the rogue."

"You do take such a dark view of your fellow-creatures," complained Joel. "Now, in my case—interested as I am in the female sex—I find it breed a great friendship to human beings in general. If she'll have me, there's little doubt there'll be a free feed to *The Jolly Huntsmen* on the day of the wedding."

"You've got your eye on a she, then? Never thought you'd have gone that far, for all your talk."

"Not a word! I can't say that I've taken more than just the usual preliminary steps that a sensible man would take; but I feel hopeful. In fact, there are very good reasons why I should be hopeful. However, time will show."

"Time will show you're a brace of silly old fools," said Mr. Codd. "This is work you ought to have took in hand full thirty year ago, if you'd been in earnest. You was too busy with your pigs and barrels of beer to think of the maidens then; 'tis a poor compliment to any woman, young enough for child-bearing, to offer her the remains of yourself now—with your cough and your gouty old hands. Lord! I might so well go courting as you; which God forbid, I'm sure."

"Women look at a man's heart, and you don't know anything about the matter," answered Joel rather warmly. "You ought to be larger-minded. I don't see that it's much good for you to go to church, Emanuel Codd, if you can say things like this the minute after. We've just heard a very good sermon on charity, I'm sure, yet the first man you meet with a cabbage, you say he's stole it; and then you tell me that a sensible woman would object to gouty-rheumatism—not even chronic at that—but merely come and go."

Joel made it clear that he desired no further speech with Mr. Codd. He hastened forward and overtook his brother, who had won a more kindly listener.

"Mrs. Pomeroy here thinks 'tis high time you turned

your thoughts to a wife," said Peter. "For my part, I tell her that you've only got to set the good example, and I shall follow very quick after. If you wait much longer, in fact, I shall be first in the field, and you may have a nephew afore you get a son."

"Always such a hopeful disposition—hasn't he?" answered the other cheerfully. "Well, we must begin to think about it seriously. It's no good pretending to less than half a century, whatever we may feel."

"I want for Ruth to come in and have supper with us to-night, if you please," said Mrs. Pomeroy; and Peter saw no objection, but Joel hesitated.

"To be frank, we was going to have a sucking-pig to our meal to-night," he explained. "I'd be sorry for her to miss it—such a dainty feeder as she be."

"A sucking-pig!" said Peter. "First I've heard of it. You'd better come along of us, Mrs. Pomeroy, and join the feast."

"No, no. And I wager that Ruth won't care. We want to have a tell—me and her."

"After all, she would enjoy some of it cold for breakfast quite as well," declared Peter. He took a little secret pleasure in ruining Joel's enterprise; but the other showed annoyance, because a sucking-pig was a great and rare incident.

"Ruth!" shouted the poulterer. "What do I hear? Mrs. Pomeroy says you ban't coming home to supper—this night of all nights."

"No, cousin Joel. I've promised to bide at Mrs. Pomeroy's, and Ives be going to see me home."

The brothers, therefore, departed, Peter cheerful and Joel cast down. A cold steak pie was the supper at Vixen Tor Farm, and after the meal Ruth, speaking privately with Avisa, indicated her difficulties. The elder's attitude lightened her mind not a little.

Humour is an attribute of female character that some-

times only develops with age and experience. No young woman knows a good jest from a bad; but life occasionally matures the judgment in that respect: Avisa's sense of humour kept her soul sweet and served largely to adjust her vision. Now she poured laughter upon Ruth's discomfort until the anxious maiden found herself laughing, too. Mrs. Pomeroy ridiculed the love-making of the brothers, dared to doubt if they were in earnest, and recommended Ruth to go on her way without care or concern.

"'Tis mostly chatter," she said. "They are as vain as peacocks really, and they want the world to think them gay young bachelors on the lookout for wives. Think no more of 'em, and if either of 'em be so silly as to offer marriage, just say 'no' and leave 'em."

"That's the point," said Ruth. "If I do leave 'em, where shall I go?"

"Come to me—while you look round. Don't meet trouble halfway. There's a good husband under thirty years old waiting for you somewhere, Ruth."

"You mean Matthew Northmore?"

"Indeed not. I mean nobody—at least nobody that can't make you love him. Northmore's all right, but not all right for you if you don't care for him. Drop that now. Tell me about Ives. He've spent a lot of time in *The Jolly Huntsmen* of late, dear chap. Young things talk to young things. I know how 'twas with me when I was young. The older generation never seemed so close to me in heart and sense as my own—though 'tis only the silly idea of youth. But youth cleaves to youth. Has Ives said anything that be worth my knowing? I don't ask for curiosity, but only for love. This girl throwing him over has been a hard stroke, and I can't say all he'd like me to say to him, because I'm right down thankful really that the girl did change her mind."

"He's not said much, except that he and she were as good as tokened. He's also told some rude things about her green dress and about Samuel Bolt, and so on. All silly talk. But the surprising point to me was he should have taken it so much to heart; because three months ago he was not for one maiden, but all. I felt terrible startled the affectionate way he used to talk about girls in general, and many I don't believe he even knew to speak to."

"Why be startled?" asked Mrs. Pomeroy; "I used to like all the boys when I was his age; and all the best boys liked me, I believe!"

Ruth laughed.

"Well they might," she said. "You'd a way with you I warrant!"

"He'll do better than Jill, please God. I should dearly wish for to see him married to the right one; but I'm in no hurry. The sort he fancies now be the silly pink and white sort; for I can tell he's mighty particular, though you may not think so. He loves 'em bright and highly coloured, like the bird chooses the cherry. But presently I'm hopeful that he'll see more than skin deep."

"I wish he'd stand to work and not waste all his time, if I may say so," ventured Ruth. "'Tis only because I—I respect him so much that I presume to——"

"I understand, my dear. 'Respect' ban't the word. His mother will be very quick to respect him when he gives her the chance. Ban't respect makes people so kind to him for all his reckless silliness. 'Tis another word. 'Tis the same thing that made 'em kind and good to me when I was no better than a young wild kitten. You can't quite understand yet, because you've never been so fiery. Life tamed you very quick—worse luck. But don't take life too serious, Ruth. Laugh oftener. When you want to laugh, mind you do. There's a lot

must be well worth laughing at up to *The Jolly Huntsmen*. And don't you fear to laugh at Ives. Laughter often be a good tonic for an unhappy young man—better'n beer anyway."

"I shall never laugh at him," said Ruth solemnly.

Then the evening ended and young Pomeroy, at his mother's wish and with no very good grace, saw Ruth over the half mile of dark moorland that separated the farm of Vixen Tor from Merivale.

Lizzie Pomeroy asked her mother's opinion of Ruth after the girl had gone; but the elder committed herself to few words and hid much that was in her mind.

"She's a nice sensible young woman in my opinion. Life's been sad with her and made her a thought careful and anxious for her years; but she'll get younger as she gets older, I hope. A very nice maiden indeed. Wish there was more of that sort in these parts."

"I like her, too," declared Lizzie. "If Ives would fall in love with her now, mother!"

"Don't you take to matchmaking at your time of life, my dear. Ives won't ask advice in that matter."

"But wouldn't she suit him and be just the wife for him?" persisted Lizzie.

"No—not yet," answered Avisa. "If you want the unkind truth, my pretty girl, Ruth is too good for our dear chap at present."

"Mother! I'd never have thought to hear you say that."

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled.

"That's because you don't know much about your own mother yet, Lizzie. But you will. That's a joy I'm content to wait for. But 'tis the best that can fall to the lot of some parents: when their children begin to know 'em. Not that it always happens. They tell ''tis a wise father that knows his own son'; and 'tis a wise daughter that knows her own mother, I dare say."

"We know you for the dearest mother ever any boy and girl had," declared Lizzie fervently. "And Ives do know it quite as well as me, when he's not in one of his silly tantrums."

"Then I'm a happy woman and ought to be very well content with both of you," answered Avisa.

CHAPTER V

KING TOR

One evening in early spring, Jill Wickett and Samuel Bolt climbed up the hill east of Walla Valley, and ascended those wide and shaggy slopes of wilderness that rise upward to King Tor. Near this elevation men have scratched in Dartmoor's bosom for stone, and great quarries still yield their wealth of granite; while upon the commons beneath appear many evidences of a neolithic people who haunted these uplands and sequestered deserts when the world was younger. Cairns, parallelitha, ruined lodges and other aboriginal monuments lie round about this region; and from King Tor's summit also appeared the winding waters of Walla, dancing over the Moor, sinking to the lowlands, and glimmering through the first verdure of spring woods. In the valley, larches spired with the light behind them, and Vixen Tor rose gloomy against the grass slopes round about it. Jill's eyes rested on the farm beneath the Vixen; then they turned to her lover's cottage standing beside the road that ran, like a white thread, through Merivale. Anon a flash of water again attracted her attention to the home of the Pomeroys, where sinking sunshine caught a streamlet and set it glittering. Far distant, under the increasing glory of the west, Cornwall lay like a cloud, and her lulls and vales, mingling with the magic of the air, rolled unsubstantial as the pageant of sunset above them.

Jill and Samuel proceeded towards the summit of King Tor, while Mr. Bolt chattered volubly in a thin but cheer-

ful voice. He stood at the threshold of life's romance and his cup of joy was brimming. So much happiness almost rendered him incoherent. The woman listened but showed only a little kindred emotion. It might have been suspected that the enthusiasm of her companion somewhat wearied her.

Samuel Bolt was full of the future, and now his flood of ideas, together with the steepness of the path, made him pant. Finally he became breathless and stood still to recover. He was a high-shouldered and undersized man with a kind and gentle face. His watery eyes lacked virile force, and his expression was one of child-like hope and trust. A nondescript, brown moustache and small flat whiskers adorned his rounded countenance. His cheeks were rather highly-coloured and smooth as a baby's. His brow was also unfurrowed. He smiled a great deal and his laugh rang shrill. Samuel had an emotional nature. Friends said of him that he was all heart and charity; indifferent folk, for he had no enemies, declared that he narrowly escaped being weak in his head. His business was to drive a steam roller where roads were being mended round about the neighbouring parishes; and his pleasure was to play a little wooden flute.

Now he coughed and grinned through the water in his eyes.

"Pat me on the back, Jill," he said.

The girl obeyed, but a smile, with which she answered his, was fleeting and wintry.

"Don't talk no more. Keep your wind for the hill. Us'll hear some more of your great opinions when we get to the top," she answered.

The words indicated very accurately her attitude to her sweetheart, and also revealed something of the maiden's nature. They were hard, almost contemptuous; but she uttered them in a pleasant voice, and they brought no pang to Samuel.

Jill Wickett was a handsome woman cast in the grand mould. Her hair, of a shade between red and yellow, like a bright sponge, though a hot and unrestful colour, was of superb abundance. Her eyes matched it, but her eyelashes were pale as straw. Eyes and mouth and a rather thin nose all told of temper. She was freckled and her skin belonged to that clear order common with light or red women. A great indifference as to attire marked Jill. She trusted to her curious face, fine form and wonderful hair. Her clothes were poor and untidy. Even in these her courting days, she was a slattern. The hem of her old gown was frayed, and beneath it a blue petticoat hung down behind and swept the earth. Her shoes were large and the right one had a piece of string in it instead of a lace. Two buttons from the neck of her bodice were gone, and the garment itself gaped half an inch at a seam in the back. She walked with an easy, swinging stride, and went up the hill more swiftly than her lover. Indeed, she reached the top of King Tor two minutes before Samuel. Then she chose a comfortable natural seat and reclined amid the boulders; sighed after her exertions; pushed her sand-coloured locks out of her eyes, and looked down at her lover's figure toiling upward. For the first time she noted that his knees were a little bent inward, and the accident added to the physical meanness of his appearance. She frowned and turned her eyes away from him impatiently.

Soon he sat beside her and panted rather hard. She noticed a wheeze in his throat as he took long breaths, and it irritated her.

"How you do puff!" she said in a discontented tone of voice.

"Well I may. We ain't all got your wonderful parts. 'Tis more like a bird going up a hill than a woman of ten stone to see you," he declared amiably. Then he continued: "Mother said, only backalong Sunday, that to

see you in a hurry—why, 'twas like a flying creature—so swift can you travel."

"She never have seen me in a hurry, because I never be in one," answered Jill.

"You be in a hurry to marry me, I hope. Can you believe that 'tis little more than eight months off, my precious? Every morning when I wake up, I say, 'Thank the watching Lord, I'm one day nearer my Jill.'"

"You didn't ought to be so fond. I'm not half what you think me."

"Don't you say that! You'm a thousand times better than anybody knows—even me. Trust mother to tell—such a judge of characters as her. But I do wish you'd button up they front buttons to the neck afore you see her. She's got such an eye for a button."

"You mind your own business. Anyway my buttons ban't your business. This here dress have shrinked since I washed un. You don't want me to choke myself, I suppose."

He regarded her plump neck with admiration; then he bent over and kissed it.

"Bless your beautiful skin—like rose-leaves. But can't you let the neck out a bit?"

"No," she said shortly. "Ban't worth while. Shan't wear it much longer. I'm making up that stuff as you brought me, and 'twill be ready pretty soon. But I like print best myself, for all that. 'Tis cooler."

He blinked and smiled at her. Then he came closer and put his arm round her waist.

"Could sit like this for evermore," he said.

She was not responsive, but presently a more gentle expression came into her eyes and she rubbed her ear against his.

"You'm a good chap," she declared. "But I do wish you was shorter and sharper with me, and with your mother, too, for that matter."

"What an idea! The two living creatures I love best in the whole world. Not very likely. Mother—well you know her. An unkind word from me would kill her, I reckon. Have you seen her new house now I've hanged the wall-paper in the front parlour?"

"No, I haven't."

"Very nice it looks. She almost shed tears of joy and wonder when 'twas done, and I let her come in and see. Honeysuckle is her favourite flower, and I found a paper all crawled over with huge bunches of honeysuckle. Ninepence a piece it cost, yet I couldn't resist it. 'Twas worth anything to see her joy when I took her across to look for the first time."

"When do she go in?"

"By the end of June 'twill be ready."

"Then, when she's gone, you'll set about your own house?"

"Of course. I mean to have it just to a hair as you want it. A few things of mother's, such as blinds and little trifles, I'd wish to keep for memory's sake. Anyway, we can't better 'em. But 'twill be your home and all must be to your way of thinking. I seed a couple of brave pictures to Tavistock last time I was there—proper painted pictures—one a windmill with the sun setting, and only eighteen shillings, frame and all complete. I want for you to have a few rich, fancy things like that in your parlour. Mother's got a surprise for you, too. But I mustn't say anything about that. That reminds me, would you like some young gillyflowers? I've got a good packet of seed for mother's garden, and I can scatter a bit round our own, if you like 'em."

She did not answer. Her eyes were looking down below upon the farmhouse that shone with white face under the great crags of the Vixen. Samuel followed her glance.

"I had speech with that rash young chap a bit ago. Mother and his mother be old friends, you know. He's

felt losing of you cruel, my darling dear. Never should have thought he could feel so much about anything. Threatenings and slaughters he breathed out against me! But they laugh who win."

"What did you say to him, Samuel?"

"Why, after he'd called me dirt, and scum, and the trash of the earth, and such like, and asked me how I dared come between you and him, I just said to his face that he ought to know better than speak so coarse to a harmless, honest man. I said, 'She've made open free choice betwixt us, and you'm a very mean sort of chap to try to bully me.' I said, 'The thing is done now and you know her well enough to know she ban't changeable.' With that he answered, and I just marched off and left him."

"And—what? What did he answer?"

"No matter—'twas a very ungentlemanly way to speak of any female—least of all you."

"I know what he said well enough. He told you I had changed once, and—perhaps would again."

Samuel stared.

"My stars! How did you know that?"

"Because I know him. I know just what he thought, and what he said, and what he swore when I took you. Not that I ever was really tokened to him for a second—you know that, Sam."

"My mother figured him up pretty well, I believe. She says he'll never come to good—too light-minded. And he won't be a good husband for any one female, owing to his large liking for 'em all. So my mother says. Now I never felt the call of the female in my nature till I met you, Jill. Then it drew me, like the moon draws the sea. From being a hopeful and patient man, I growed that fiery and short and fierce, you'd never believe! If I'd been a dog, you'd have said I was going mad. Mother found it out. 'You'm in love,' she said all of a sudden

one day. I was terrible astonished to hear her, for I'd thought 'twas hidden."

Jill pursued her own reflections.

"Ives Pomeroy said that I should change again—eh? And no doubt he thinks so. But he thinks wrong—as usual. He don't know how to treat a woman—for all he's so mighty fond of 'em. Wanted for me to say I was sorry to him! A likely thing—and him in the wrong of course."

"Of course he was I'll warrant. A very wrong-headed chap, most times."

"And no great catch when all's said and done, only renter—an' just the fashion of man to forget to pay his rent some day. That lazy, too. He don't know what work means—very different to you, Samuel."

"Don't think no more about him. 'Work!' He never did a day's honest work in his life, poor chap. But I can't say hard things against him. 'Twouldn't be Christian, seeing what I've won and he've missed."

"A blustering overbearing man, and don't know the hard edge of the world at all yet. 'Twould do him good to be hungry and thirsty a bit," she said.

"He'm hungry and thirsty both—for you. A surly sort of man. For my part I never could see what the women saw in his face—to say it kindly," declared Samuel. "A hang-dog countenance he've gotten in my opinion. A sulky look in his eyes and a curly forehead—for all the world like a young, bad-tempered bull."

But the girl did not answer this criticism of Ives Pomeroy. Whatever might be her view of the other's mental peculiarities, his face was good to her. The curly hair, the glance of sulky power, the imperious mien and commanding gesture—all were agreeable. Her nature enjoyed to reflect upon these things, and now it did so, while the placid and genial inanity of Samuel's countenance pointed the mental picture by force of contrast.

"Mother——" he began again; then a sudden spark of self flashed up from the unfathomed depths of Jill.

"Do leave your mother alone for a bit, there's a dear. I'm getting a thought weary of your mother—not she herself—but her on your tongue from morning till night. We'm very good friends, and always shall be, I hope. Still—give the subject a rest. Tell about your uncle down to Plymouth for a change."

Mr. Bolt was fluttered and a little alarmed. He withdrew his arm from Jill's waist.

"Tired of mother!" he said. Then he spoke as firmly as he could and tried to blink some fierceness into his mild eyes. "That won't do, Jill. I can't hear you talk like that and suffer it. When once you come to know the wonders of that woman, and especially all she've done for me from my birth up, you'll never be tired of the subject. Anyway, I can tell you this: she's never tired of hearing me tell about you—never. I'm very sorry you spoke that."

Samuel's tone rang with reproach and Jill yawned into his face as she expressed a sort of contrition.

"All right—all right," she answered. "I didn't mean nothing. Don't be so serious about it. Your mother and me understand each other very well. She's kindness made alive."

Samuel grew calm again and put his arm around her once more.

"Uncle's no better and no worse," he said.

"Hope to God the man's not going to have a long illness, anyhow. I know what them long illnesses mean only too well. They eat up all the money, like a cat laps milk."

"I've sometimes wondered, when he goes, whether you'd like for me to take over his business myself instead of selling it."

"'Twould suit me very well," she answered with awak-

ened interest. The subject pleased her. She sat up and grew animated.

"I'd love to leave this dreary hole, I can tell you. And the shop down to Plymouth would be a Godsend, I'm sure."

"Of course, mother——" he began, then broke off abruptly. "Not that we must count on chickens before they are hatched, however."

"I ban't that sort, I assure 'e," she answered. "Needn't think I'm a hopeful woman—very far from it. I've had everything in my life to make me take the black view, and I always do, and always shall do. But if you've told me truth, your uncle's dying pretty brisk of something inside; and he's got none so near as you, and he's saved three thousand pound, very near, and he's told you the money's to be yours under his will."

"Exactly how it stands," declared Samuel. "And I've been a very good nephew to him so far as I could. I shall be sorry when he goes; but a doctor to Plymouth gives him little more than six months; and when I was last along with the poor man, he said, 'I shan't send you no wedding present, Sam, because, long afore your first child's born, I shall be under the earth and all I have will be yours.' I said I hoped not; but no doubt 'twill be so. The dying ban't deceived."

"Do he want to see me?"

"He didn't say so. But I'm very wishful he should. Perhaps we might go down Easter Monday and cheer him up? There's a cheap excursion from Tavistock."

"I should like to see the shop. What is it? Pens and ink and stationery and such like?"

"Just so. I'm really rather doubtful if a man so ignorant as me could undertake it. We should have to keep on the young lady in the shop, Jill."

"Oh, no, we shouldn't! I'd soon larn the ways of it."

"Couldn't have you cooped up behind a counter. You'd

have to look after the house. And there's what we should have to do about mother, too. That's a puzzler, for she'd never live in a town."

Jill reflected and smiled to herself. Then something moving in the red sunset light upon the heath below attracted her attention.

"Who be they downalong?" she asked.

Samuel screwed up his eyes.

"I see 'em. 'Tis Miss Lizzie Pomeroy and her young man going homeward," he said.

"The schoolmaster from Sampford Spiney?"

"Yes—she've been lucky. He's a learned young chap, and good-looking as well."

"Wonder what he saw in that little bantam hen?"

"She's small, but a neat, trim maiden. And got her mother's sense—so my mother tells me."

"A little, pin-tailed creature! I don't call her a woman—she's no more than a slip of a child."

"There's few with your splendid round shape. A regular queen among 'em you be."

Jill's thoughts were on the schoolmaster. He read the lessons in church sometimes. He was tall and wore fine clothes. She wondered why Lizzie Pomeroy pleased him.

"The big chaps often take little women," Jill said aloud, pursuing her own thoughts. She remembered at the same moment that she stood two inches taller than Samuel.

"Me an' Ives Pomeroy was the same height to a hair," she remarked thoughtfully.

Samuel felt a slow, growing oppression of mind. The general trend of conversation had discouraged him.

"Let's be going," he said. "'Twill be dark afore we reach the road."

Jill rose immediately.

"You can see me as far as the bridge, Sam."

"Ban't you coming back to supper?"

"Not to-night. I'm wanted at home."

His face fell and she exerted herself a little to cheer him. At the sound of loving words he was soon happy and enthusiastic again. Together they reached Ward Bridge over Walla. Then they climbed the hill beyond, and the moon already began to throw a faint grey light before Samuel kissed Jill fervently, called down the blessing of Heaven upon her, and departed.

She went slowly forward to her home at Sampford Spiney. Then suddenly came a figure in the dark and stopped the way. A man jumped from a broken place in the hedgerow and stood against her. For a moment Jill was alarmed; but when she recognised the intruder upon her peace, fear changed to anger.

CHAPTER VI

A STORMY SUPPER PARTY

Ives Pomeroy stood in the middle of the road, and when Jill moved to pass him, he prevented her.

"You've got to speak a word or two to me afore you go on," he said. "I saw you in the valley with that moon-faced fool, and reckoned you'd be coming this way presently. I've kept off you as long as I could, but there are some things that happen I will have explained, and the way you've treated me be one of them."

"I wasn't in the valley with no moon-faced fool. So you can take that back to begin with," she answered. "There's fools of all sorts and all colours; and don't think I'm afraid of answering your question, because I'm not."

"That's all right then. 'Twouldn't be much like you, or me either, to be afear'd of anything. Perhaps you'll sit here 'pon this log of wood for a minute and listen to me."

She obeyed. Then she put her chin in her hands and her elbows on her knees.

"Speak what you've got to speak quickly, please," she said. "I can't bide here all night."

"Why for did you throw me over for Samuel Bolt?"

She made a gesture of impatience.

"Is that all you've got to say? Don't you know the answer as well as I do?"

"I don't, else I shouldn't ask you."

"If you look into your own mind, you'll see the answer very quick."

"No, I shan't. So perhaps you'll speak."

"The reason is that I don't trust you. There's a deal too much of the Jacky-toad[1] in you for me, and a deal too much pride. Proud as a peacock—Lord knows what for. I don't see that you've got much to be proud of except your face. And that wasn't your making. All you be doing for it is to spoil it by glowering and frowning at the world, as if all people were your enemies. You don't know how to please a woman. You're a bully really; and I won't marry a bully anyway."

"So that's it? I'm not a bully, and very well you know how I treated you. I was as good a lover as ever you be likely to have. Nothing was too hard. I'd have went through fire and water for you, and you know it. But, damn it all, us wants something for our worship. When you wronged me cruel and wouldn't say you were sorry——"

"I didn't wrong you cruel."

"You did; and wouldn't say you were sorry. So that showed you weren't sorry. You tell me to look in my mind—you look in yours, Jill, and you'll see a dirty, cowardly, mean piece of work. You'll see a woman who scraped a quarrel with a straight man because she wanted to be rid of him."

"That's a lie. I never wanted to be rid of you till you showed me a glimpse of the truth about yourself. Then I knowed you would be selfish and hard, and soon grow sick of me."

"Wanted to be rid of him," repeated Ives. "For why? Because she'd found a chap as owned a cottage and had an uncle as would leave him oceans of money presently."

"Ives! How can you dare to say that!"

"Because it's true. You think nobody's got any sense or cunning but yourself. You think you can hoodwink everybody. But it takes more than a woman to throw

[1] Jacky-toad: Will-o'-the-wisp.

dust in my eyes. I know injustice when I see it. Samuel was dead struck on you and got his old mother to have you to tea when he wasn't there. Then she tells you all his noble qualities and vartues, and how the cottage is his own, and how his uncle to Plymouth be dying and will leave him a fortune. And then—though you'd never have given the sheep-faced creature a thought afore—you have a row with me and—and——"

"Stop!" she said rising. "If you could think so badly of me as that, you never loved me at all, and I'm very thankful I've escaped from you. I didn't throw you over and you've no right to say I did. 'Tis all the other way, God knows. You was rude and unkind to me, and ordered me about, and wouldn't say you were sorry, so I soon felt I was nought better than a dog to you. You turned your back on me in the public road, and walked right off and scorned me as if I was dirt. What woman was going to stand that? I'm not made of stone. I'm not a patient, spiritless creature to be a beast of burden for any man. I'll give everything to the chap I love. I'll pour out my heart and strength and soul for him; but I will have his heart and strength for mine. I want to be happy, not miserable. I want to be mistress of my home when I've got one, not a downtrodden rag of a woman kept by a man to cook his food and bear his children. You've shown enough of yourself to me to prove yourself a tyrant to females, so there's an end of it. Now I'll go."

"Go to hell for all I care," answered Ives furiously. "A girl to preach to me as if she was my grandmother! And all lies, too. I see it very clear: you're marrying a fool for his money; you're marrying a ninny-hammer as you can twist round your finger, and blind, and play with, and laugh at. No honest woman would do that. See what his love be worth compared to mine."

"I meant to. He don't talk so loud as you, or roll

his eyes so much; but he stands to work and understands what a woman wants, and knows how to worship 'em."

"Worship 'em!—like a silly dog pawing your gown, I suppose. Fawning like a cur—going on his knees for a kiss—bleating his nonsense in season and out. You know whether he makes love like what I did!"

"Of course no other chap be so clever as you. A wonderful masterpiece of a man, quite throwed away to Merivale. Nobody can love a woman like you. Anyway, you've had enough practice. And—and I'll ax you not to speak to me no more, whether or no. The woman that'll make you happy's a worm, as'll do nought but crawl and cringe and tell you day and night what a grand person you are."

"Talk—talk—and all to try and hurt me, you spiteful toad! Just because I didn't give you a new gown to go to church in!"

She passed him and walked rapidly away.

"You'll wish your cake was dough again, yet!" he shouted after her; but she let him have the last word and he was far the angrier of the two when they parted. A last oath he hurled into the darkness after Jill; then he returned home and burst stormily upon the supper party assembled there.

"I've had it out with her," he began. "'Twas just as I thought. I told her straight why she'd gone to Samuel Bolt—because he'd got a rich uncle going to die. She couldn't deny it, but talked a lot of drivel about my temper. However, she knows I've seen through her. I've given her a proper dose of the truth to-night; and I've got a word to say to Bolt, too. Then I wash my hands of the blasted pair of 'em forever more."

A visitor sat at the board and he looked somewhat uneasy before this storm. Arthur Brown, the studious young schoolmaster of Sampford Spiney, who had recently

taken a walk with Lizzie Pomeroy, was a man of three and thirty. He had been educated in London, and he knew the elements of most branches of learning except human nature. Passion was foreign to his character. He liked life to be quiet, "genteel," and methodical. Lizzie had wakened interest in his heart by reason of her wonderful neatness; by her manners in church, where she sang in the choir; and by her shyness. He prospered with shy women best. Those who were not shy, awakened that emotion in him.

Arthur Brown was sententious, sensible, careful of his money, and ignorant of the world. He disliked Ives Pomeroy cordially, and had secret hopes that after marriage he would be promoted to some school nearer a city and pursue life a good deal further from his wife's family. He cared not for the country except as a theatre for field botany. When he walked abroad, his eyes were always on the earth or in the hedge. He never lifted them excepting at public worship. He knew the rafters of the church at Sampford Spiney better than the face of the sky. He was a man who found it easy to be correct, honest, and upright; and he had a natural instinct to dispense his opinions. Lizzie loved him, considered him the wisest and greatest spirit that the world had shown to her, and wished a thousand times a day that her brother was more like him.

Now, as Ives rattled on, Mrs. Pomeroy nodded gently, with that characteristic inclination of the head which often answered for speech with her and took the place of much more than mere affirmative. Then her boy fell moodily upon his supper, and Arthur Brown, who usually showed uneasiness when Lizzie's brother was present, endeavoured to change the subject.

"Can I do anything in London for you, Mrs. Pomeroy?" he asked Avisa. "I am going up for two days in the Easter holiday. There is a May Meeting I want

to attend, and it will just fit in. We of the educational world are beginning to——"

Ives interrupted him.

"I said to her, in plain words, that she might go to hell in her green dress for all I cared, and Bolt along with her. And I also said that she'd live to be sorry she ever married a fool for his money."

"Hush, my dear. Arthur be talking," answered his mother.

"Talking—what's the use of talking?"

"There's nought you can do in London for me, but I hope you'll enjoy it—being born to the manner of cities," said Avisa.

"Thank you—thank you. It rubs off the rust, Mrs. Pomeroy. The School Union is a great organization. I may very likely be asked to address them at Exeter Hall —if we have time. There's a lot in method—when one is teaching. I myself have made experiments on the immature mind during the last five years. We do too much by rote and not enough by sense. The thing is first to train the budding natural instincts. We begin at the wrong end, in fact."

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled.

"You're right. 'Tis a fault of the age, my dear. They beginned at the other end—with a birch—in my young days. And I do think the old generation of men was quite as wise and a lot tougher than the chaps you be turning out."

"Everything is changing. Economical considerations, so I read——"

"Be you going to get Lizzie her tokening ring when you'm in London?" asked Ives, like a pistol shot. "Because 'tis about time she had it."

Mr. Brown was naturally disturbed.

"Certainly I am," he said. "Don't think that my delay meant any disrespect to your sister. Very far from that.

But we both attached little importance to an outward and visible sign of—of the inward and spiritual compact."

"All the same, there's a right way and a wrong way of courting, and she ought to have it—oughtn't she, mother?"

"She's going to have it," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"And I may say it will be of considerable value," added Arthur Brown. "It happens that a fellow-schoolmaster of mine has a brother who is a jeweller. He is called Mr. Harold Wilkinson, and he is in a pretty rising way of business in the Tottenham Court Road. I shall go to him for Lizzie's ring; and, on Thursday week, the fifteenth day of May, that ring will, God willing, be upon Lizzie's finger; and I hope it will become an heirloom in the family."

He spoke with arid correctness. Then all rose from the table.

Old Mrs. Pomeroy retired immediately after the meal; the lovers spent an hour in the parlour alone, before Arthur returned to his lodgings at Sampford Spiney; there remained at the table Mr. Codd, his mistress, and Ives.

Then Emanuel went out and Avisa was left alone with her son. He sat by the fire and presently took his pipe out of his pocket. His mother cleared the table.

"Are you better to-night?" he asked presently.

"Yes, dear—quite the thing again. 'Twas nought."

He smoked for five minutes and she waited for him knowing that he must storm a while longer before peace came. Then his torment of mind burst forth again. He swore and flung his clay pipe upon the hearth so that it broke into many pieces.

"I wish to God you wouldn't be so deadly calm, mother! Don't you know my blood's boiling in me at this damned trick? Can't you feel a bit? Can't you——?"

"Young blood should boil," she said. "Only don't let it boil over. There's none be so sorry for your sorrow

as I am. There's none long and pray for your steadfast, settled happiness like I do. But such things as be steadfast and settled and sure, don't come to the likes of you at your time of life. There's no sight of land for you yet, Ives—only the wild sea, I reckon; and your lighthouse the stars."

"Everybody be against me—even her. And I could have sworn that she was a good woman and sensible. Show 'em money and out comes the naked truth about 'em! I hate the whole pack of 'em now. Never again will I have ought to do with 'em. You be the only one of 'em worth a damn."

She laughed and came and kissed his hair.

"Bless your curly, silly head! Wait a bit; turn to work—'tis the best balm of life and the only thing you can trust to stand between you and misery. Work and you'll come back to yourself again presently. Oak-rinding will begin after Easter, you know—not ours, but the neighbours'. You can always have as much as you please for the asking, and you like it. I'm hopeful you'll put a lot of time into it, Ives."

"'Oak-rinding!' And me torn to pieces!"

"Stripping bark be good tonic work, your father used to say. Try it. Try toil that'll bring you home dead beat and ready for nought but bed. Show the chaps what you can do. Nobody knows but me, Ives. A good few men round about here doubt if you can stand to work at all: Matthew Northmore, for one. Show 'em what you can do."

"Northmore! I could tie the man in a knot. Look at my arms alongside his. All the same, 'tis only human I should smart for this. All my hopes dashed and—and 'tis a very cruel thing, mother, when you think you've found your life's partner and the identical woman to make you a happy man, to find her a greedy, lying minx like that."

"So 'tis then. Seek a woman to make you a wise man—not a happy one. Though happiness and wisdom ought to be the same, I suppose."

Ives broke off suddenly. His waning tribulation turned upon others and he declared a new grievance.

"If that man don't bring Lizzie back a proper ring from London, I'll have a row with him."

"Better you let 'em go their own way. They understand one another very well."

He expressed scorn.

"A frosty business. Call that love! He's too close-fisted to be any good at loving. Does he ever kiss her? Blessed if I think he does. If you went in the parlour now, suddenly, you'd see 'em sitting six feet apart talking about Exeter Hall!"

She laughed and stroked his head.

"We ban't all built of your clay—a fortunate thing, too. They be beautiful to see, as you'd say if you was older. A perfect understanding betwixt them."

"I lay you didn't go courting that way, mother!"

Mr. Codd entered breathlessly.

"Looking out from my winder, I seed somebody moving in the garden," he said. "Be quick, Ives, and you'll catch 'em. They was near the lettuce frames—bent on no good, I promise you!"

Ives had already disappeared; but a moment later he returned with a woman.

"Wrong as usual. 'Tis only Moleskin's daughter. She went along into the garden in the dark and missed the road to the house."

Mary Cawker thrust an anxious face into the light. She was an ugly, careworn woman of thirty.

"Comed down for a pint of milk—can't get it anywhere our way," she explained. "Thought perhaps you'd pardon me being so late. Mother's a bit queer and I want to make some rice pudden for her."

"Hope 'tis nothing of any account," said Mrs. Pomeroy. Then she took Mary's jug and went to the dairy.

"I suppose your father will be to Bellivor Tor for the hunt day to-morrow?" asked Ives.

"Sure to be there. You'll always find him where there's free meat and drink going. He fetched home a whole bottle of purple wine last year."

"Few people know what a clever man he really is," said young Pomeroy.

"Miss Cawker very well knows what a wicked man he is," declared Codd. "And she knows where he ought to be; and she knows where he will be before the end of it. You can't defy law and order forever, especially when you get over sixty years old."

The woman's face grew clouded.

"God knows I wish he could be changed," said Moleskin's daughter. "But there—'tis in his blood, the hunger for killing things."

"Hard at the fish now," declared Ives.

"Yes. Nobody kills such heavy trout as he do."

Mrs. Pomeroy brought the milk and Ives went as far as the garden gate with Mary Cawker.

"Here's a bit of green stuff if you'd like it," he said carelessly. "If your mother's ill she might get good from a fresh lettuce or two. Can you carry them?"

"In my apern, and thank you kindly, Mr. Pomeroy."

He gave her a generous load and she told him to restore the light to the frame—a thing he had quite forgotten to do.

"Look here," she said with some emotion in her voice: "One good turn deserves another. Don't you see too much of my father. He'm cruel bad company for young men, though I say it. But I know. Keep clear of him, or he'll lead you into mischief so sure as you're born."

"I can take very good care of myself."

"He'll use you. He'll use you to get his chestnuts out of the fire. More than one have suffered so."

"If he can use me, he's welcome to," declared Pomeroy scornfully. "No man ever used me: I'm not that sort. I can see through a brick wall as far as most people, Mary."

A gleam of light flashed from the house behind them and Ives heard Mr. Brown's voice bidding Lizzie "good-night."

"Here, I'm going to hide," he said. "I ban't up to that chap to-night. Too good and wise. You needn't fear to look. He won't cuddle her—much too proper for that."

As a matter of fact, Arthur Brown raised his hat to Lizzie and said, "Good-night, dear one!" Then he came down the garden path. But Mary Cawker had gone and young Pomeroy hid behind the corner of a woodstack until the schoolmaster went out and latched the garden gate behind him.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPORTSMEN

Just before Easter the weather turned very cold, the wind settled in the north and snow showers swept the Moor with mantles of whiteness. By day the sun was strong enough to melt these falls, but at night the cold conquered. There came an evening when it snowed heavily for an hour; then the clouds cleared and their masses caught the sunset and cast its radiance down upon the world beneath until the candid wilderness glowed with roseal wonders of light. After dark more snow fell, and when day came Ives Pomeroy looked out from his window at five o'clock upon the return of winter. The young leaves of spring trembled under their burden; in the yard one sheet of snow nearly an inch deep covered all things. Only the track of a sheep-dog and the trail of a bird's feet marked it. But the sun soon rolled up behind King Tor, pierced the sulky fog-banks that hung low upon the waste, and woke them to a dazzling glory of gold. The snow began to glitter and run. It swiftly vanished from the snug southern-facing places, and was already melting upon the Moor when young Pomeroy, with his fishing-rod and creel, started up the river.

By appointment under Great Mis Tor he met Moleskin, and the two tramped some miles onward, where Walla runs small and is little fished. It was the elder sportsman's custom only to seek those remote streams beyond the attention of common anglers.

"A nice bit of colour in the water," he declared, as they set up their rods; "a worm will find 'em to-day; and come presently, if it grows warmer, us'll try a fly; but I doubt that's little use."

He discoursed of sport.

"Peel be running already lower down," he said. "If us only have a fair drop of rain, I reckon there's a very good summer of fishing afore us. 'Tis not to be named in my opinion alongside of shooting; but a man must be busy, and, if the trout only ran heavier, they'd be useful to market."

Presently they parted. Moleskin began fishing and Ives went up stream half a mile before he wetted his line.

Mr. Cawker was a past master in the delicate art of angling with Stewart tackle and a worm. He wasted little time, and his knowledge enabled him to choose the right water. The river was slightly coloured, but he took no risks and kept as carefully out of sight as though Walla ran crystal clear and at summer lowness. The trout were moving, but this fisherman had no need of fingerlings, and for some time he disengaged each victim and restored it to the river. Then came something heavier, and where the water fell over a ledge of stone, boiled in a granite pot beneath and then foamed and bubbled away over a second fall, he hooked a better fish. It made one grand run and rush, leaped the lower fall, and then came to Mr. Cawker's hat. He carried no net, but wore a withered wide-awake with a hole the size of a penny in the crown. Dozens of good trout had been landed in it; and now a half-pounder twisted and bounded on the bank. Its olive and silver, flecked with ebony and scarlet, pleased Moleskin. He beamed upon it, broke its neck, and baited his hooks again.

Considerable success attended his sport, and when, two hours later, he met Ives, the younger man was also in good temper. He had by no means succeeded to the same extent, for he lacked the patience and the rare skill of the poacher; but he had killed a pound trout, and this enabled him to view Moleskin's two dozen respectable fish without envy.

They sat together in the sun, ate their sandwiches, and talked of fur, feathers, and fins.

"There's a baggering otter up the river," said Moleskin. "I see the marks of him, and I do hope as the otter hounds will be this way early in the season, for the sooner he's killed the better for sport."

"He'll work down stream after the big fish."

"May, or may not. Better out of it altogether. I be going to try down-along, between nine and ten o'clock, in Squire Serpell's water at Oaktown some evening soon. Won't name no particular evening, as these things leak out; but I dare say if you was down in the beech-hanger by eight-thirty, you might see somebody busy there."

"You'll get catched in Oaktown woods, sure as death, Moleskin, afore you've done with it."

"Not me. At my time of life woods is safest. More like to get catched in the open. But I know all about Serpell's water as well as the coverts. I've spent seven hours in holes under the banks up to my knees in the river, and men all round hunting and swearing. 'Tis what I know saves me at a pinch. Not one of Serpell's keepers has my close understanding of the place. I'll tell you another thing worth hearing: they hope the head of game down there this year be going to beat anything ever they've yet done. Hundreds and hundreds of eggs is bought, so Billy Westover tells me—the under keeper that old Gregory got sacked last year. Billy don't love 'em, and he's very glad to let me into their secrets, which come to him through his wife's brother. There'll be some splendid sport for the gentlemen this fall. You know my radical opinions on that subject."

"I'm the same," declared Ives. "Serpell's a hard, grasping old devil, and sweats all his people cruel at his tailor's shop in Plymouth."

"Certainly he does. Such men ought to pay toll to the workers—men like us, who live by the sweat of the

brow. For my part, I'm a free-trader to the backbone, and all for liberty in these matters. I hate a selfish man. Large, generous vices, such as drinking and love and such-like, I don't object to; because nature's responsible for 'em and them as work hard have got to be thirsty. But as to hoarding money, and making other folk toil to keep you in idleness, and grinding the face of the poor—why, my gorge rises at it. A regular anarchist I am, when I read the newspaper and see how one-sided the world is."

"I'm the same," declared Ives. "I hate the quality, as we call 'em—a damned bad quality most times, if you ax me."

"Capital! You never said a truer word. Well, in the fall of the year I may mention Oaktown pheasants to you again. Ban't my way to count my chickens afore they are hatched, let alone another person's; but a very grand lot of birds there ought to be; and since you'm the only chap in these parts with a head on his shoulders and right principles——"

"You can trust me all right, Moleskin."

"I know it. Wish there was more like you."

Ives tried to conceal his pleasure, but failed. He was proud of the poacher's praise and did not perceive that a very crafty old man began to need help in his enterprises.

They talked a little longer; then appeared a figure horseback, and Matthew Northmore approached them.

"Now there's a very different fashion of chap to what you be," said Moleskin. "Stiff and starched, and narrow as the grave. A regular right down Tory, him. Why for? For the most foolish reason possible. Because his father was afore him! You'll hear a lot of silly men say they'm this or that, because their father was; and when they give that reason for their opinion, you may take your oath they be poor creatures, if not actually weak in the head."

"My father was a Tory, too, for that matter."

"Exactly; but you ban't. Because you've got a larger build of mind and better education. You and me think for ourselves; this here horseman lets the dead do all his thinking for him."

Matthew Northmore rode alongside of them. He liked neither fisherman, and was passing with a slight nod, when Moleskin stopped him.

"We were just saying what a pity 'twas Bellivor Hunt Week gave such bad sport this year, Mr. Northmore. A good company, and none better mounted than you on that wonderful bright bay. Why, a meet this side of Moreton wouldn't be a meet if you wasn't there 'pon that hoss. But certainly the harriers have had very poor speed of late. Where be the hares got to these last few seasons?"

Northmore pulled up, stroked his pale beard, and looked very coldly at his questioner.

"Like your cheek to ask that question. Yes, sport was bad; and, since you begin it to me, I'll tell you this: you are more likely to know the reason than most people."

He showed anger and irritation. The growing scarcity of hares on Dartmoor was a sore subject with Matthew.

"Well, I never!" cried Mr. Cawker. "You sportsmen do let your hot minds run away with you something terrible! As much as to say you thought I knowed what becomes of the hares."

"I don't think about it. How does it happen that Tavistock Market's always got hares in season, and yet every harrier pack tells the same story?"

"Them hares to Tavistock come from Belgium, I believe."

"You know better, and so do the poulterers. They come from Dartmoor."

"Then you and your friends ought to look sharper," declared Ives. "No use grumbling and accusing people if you can't prove nothing."

Northmore flashed a hard glance at him.

"You're young," he said. "Too young to take good advice, I'm afraid, though I know you pride yourself on a lot of wide knowledge. But you offered me some advice last time we met at *The Jolly Huntsmen*, and I'll give you a little in exchange for yours. A man is known by the company he keeps."

"What then? Who be you to judge? I'd sooner be seen with an honest free-trader than a whey-faced, narrow-minded chap like you. Sport, indeed! You and a few others round about seem to think that hares and birds and fish, and everything on God's earth was only made for you to hunt and shoot and catch. You'll learn different some day. And if I choose to shoot Dartmoor hares, I shall. That's not poaching, anyway."

"There's no such thing as poaching," declared Moleskin. "'Tis just a silly word invented by the rich against the poor. Sport be sport. And nobody's going to convince me about it. Besides 'twill be time enough to talk when any man catches me out in it."

"They'll catch you presently—the sooner the better," said Northmore harshly. "You're a blackguard, and you know you are. And if I ever get the chance to help 'em catch you—or any of the young men you lead wrong—I shall do it."

"You Christian men!" cried Moleskin. "And a sportsman, too! I'm sure I wish you had larger opinions. Just to show you the difference betwixt us, I was coming to you only to-morrow to offer to do you a good turn."

"Then don't. I won't have you at Stone Park."

"Charity, charity—where's your charity, hare-hunter? I was coming—what for d'you suppose? To offer to trap your rabbits. All free, gratis, and for nothing. Up over at dawn a bit backalong, I saw the rabbits on your grass in hundreds of dozens. 'That poor man!' I said. 'Little does he know how they vermin be treating him while he

lies in bed of a morning sleeping the sleep of the just!' But if you order me off, well, you must look to it yourself, neighbour."

"'Hundreds of dozens!' I've hardly got a rabbit in my ground now."

Moleskin smiled.

"Then, no doubt, they was monkeys, or perhaps kangaroos. My eyesight ban't what it used to be, worse luck. Still, I thought I knowed a rabbit from a sheep."

"Come on, Cawker," said Ives. "Us don't want to be talking here all night."

"Will 'e buy a few good trout, Mr. Northmore?" asked Moleskin, changing the subject and showing the contents of a battered creel.

"Poached, too," answered Matthew. "For 'tis poaching, as I always hold, to use natural bait on these streams. A paltry thing. Artificial fly ought to be the law."

"Caught with the gardener's fly all quite correct and regular," said Moleskin. "You won't take a couple of pound of 'em?"

"You'll call it poaching to breathe the air next," cried Pomeroy. "Such a narrow-minded man never comed on the Moor yet! Threatening and rating your betters—all because your blasted hounds can't catch hares! Come on, Moleskin; what's the sense of wasting your words on such as him?"

"A fool and his folly are never parted," answered the other. "If it wasn't so, I'd take the trouble to talk to you; but you'll need a smart lesson or two before you're a decent member of society; and I hope the smart lessons will come along before you've gone to the dogs for good and all."

"Go to hell!" shouted Ives in a rage. "You dare to preach to me! And mind this: never you interfere with me or there'll be trouble."

But Northmore had ridden away and he did not answer these promises.

Moleskin laughed, brought a box of brandlings from his inner pocket, and began to bait his hooks anew.

"Wise in his own conceit, that long-faced chap," he said. "He'm in love—that's the naked truth; and the state often makes a man as vicious as a trapped rat—specially if it ban't going right. If Ruth Rendle took him, you'd find he'd have a large mind about things in general very quick. It might not last, but for a bit he'd be much nicer to deal with. As things are, he's nasty. Calls himself a sportsman. Lord forgive him, he don't know the meaning of the word."

Moleskin winked the eye with a fallen lid; then lighted a pipe and proceeded with his fishing. But Ives found himself in no condition to resume the pastime. His temper called for more active physical operations. Therefore he put up his rod and set off to walk swiftly homeward. One consolation softened his fiery mood: his mother would have a proud trout for her supper. She would also be expected to praise the fisherman responsible for such a wonder.

CHAPTER VIII

BUDDING OF THE LARCHES

THE hamlet of Merivale boasted no place of worship, but Sampford Spiney's crocketed church-towers were visible in the distance, and when the rainy wind blew, thin bell-music filtered up Walla valley on the seventh day, and certain of the folk would answer that summons.

From Vixen Tor, Avisa and her children set out on Easter Sunday.

To Christians this anniversary possesses a special significance, and those who believe in the resurrection of the dead, at Easter often deck their graves with the only offerings that the dead can receive. Therefore the women carried flowers. Lizzie brought daffodils and violets; her mother bore a bunch of Maréchal Niel roses, the gift of a nursery gardener at Tavistock. Scattered upon the road behind them, others followed. Ruth Rendle walked between the brothers Toop, and Matthew Northmore came alone a quarter of a mile in the rear.

Against the tower of the unnamed church, bursting beech-buds spattered their newborn green; round about were lifted the boles of many trees, and spring moved amid the sleeping-places beneath. Primroses peeped from the mounds where children had planted them, and the wood-sorrel drooped its frail, lovely bells above much dust of vanished men. Here the folk slept; the wind murmured; the seasons marked their passage in lush growth of dock and darnel at the time of the scythe; in falling rain and falling leaves; in starlight and frost and the silences of winter nights. Grey through the thickening trees, the heights of Pu Tor towered, round about the land fell by fields and homesteads to the river.

The gravestone of Ives Pomeroy stood to the north of the church tower. It was of slate, deeply incised; but ample room remained upon it to record his wife's passing when she should sink to lie with him. The dead man's favourite text was also graven here by his command—part of Isaiah i. 2: "Is my hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?"

Lizzie arranged the flowers, and Ives, at his mother's direction, drew a dandelion from its roothold on the grave. Many other little companies also brought their gifts and arranged them in tin crosses and jam-pots. Some wore holiday colours and went cheerfully about their tender task; others were clad in black and laid their flowers silently on recent mounds. The bells rang their loudest; the sun shone; a little knot of men in black stood near the porch to watch the congregation enter.

"I'm not going in to-day, mother," said Ives suddenly.

"'Tis a very special day, and I could much wish that you would," she answered quietly.

"What's the sense of it? I'm in no case for all this bleating and psalm-singing; and as for eating the Bread, 'twould choke me, feeling so damned wicked as I have of late."

Avisa nodded her head.

"There's sense in that," she said. "I know how 'tis with you. Walk back along through the incountry and see what's doing, and—perhaps you'll come to evening service with me."

He hesitated, for he knew that it would be good to her to have him beside her in church. An instinct to please her kept him dawdling about the churchyard a while after Avisa had entered; then he shook himself impatiently and strode off down the deep lanes to the river.

Lizzie and Arthur Brown sat together in church near Mrs. Pomeroy. They whispered and shook their heads at the conduct of Ives. To the schoolmaster it seemed a

very serious defection on such a day—almost equivalent to a denial of faith. The young people were more concerned about it than the mother, and Lizzie found her joy at the service clouded. She even cried a little in secret, for this was a terrible event to her. She only grew more resigned when Arthur went to the lectern.

Meantime the stricken Ives hung over Ward Bridge, lighted his pipe, and smoked in gloom. Before him Walla's waters foamed under a haze of grey twigs and drooping branches. Spring had fondled the trees and they were full of the mellow light of opening buds. The river ran clear and flashed a salute to each moss-clad stone upon her way. She twinkled into foam at many falls; she loitered in backwaters and little bays, she smoothed her face to stillness that young stars and buds and delicious things, bursting their sheaths, might bend and see their own loveliness. The oaks were giving out an amber light under the sunshine; the alders opened tiny trim fans of green; the great woodrush and water parsnip sprawled with their feet in the river; and kingcups, cuckoo-flowers, and the foliage of the iris brightened the water-meadows. Aloft, along deep hillsides under Vixen Tor, countless pavilions of the larch were glittering in their first rapture of young green. The vernal glory of them was touched and outlined with pure light, so that each particular tree made itself felt in the mass, and uttered that magic note of reality and life, beyond all power of artist's word or painter's stain to win from Nature and set upon paper. Each spire of all these myriad spires preserved a gracious individual distinction in the commonwealth; perhaps not one would have been missed; yet not one could have been spared from that emerald mantle here superbly flung upon the shoulders of Spring. Light dwelt in them as in its proper home; their untold glory held even children's eyes. And beneath them ran the river and spread fields that echoed with the music of lambs.

Young Pomeroy found his mind presently turn to peace. Mundane matters unconsciously interested him a little. For the larches he had no eyes; but he watched a heavy trout feeding beneath him; then he sought the other parapet of the bridge, looked downstream and marked the great Oaktown coverts of laurel and rhododendron that here spread dark and shining under the russet and grey of the trees. These underwoods were full of game. Deep within them lay the pheasants' quarters. Many men worked in the forest all the year round; a few took their pleasure there for a month or two when the shooting season came; and a still more limited number—the tribe of Moleskin—trespassed therein and combined business with pleasure in defiance of right conduct.

A certain ferocity of spirit made Ives court rather than ignore his kind on this rare spring morning. Presently he left the bridge, broke public bounds by climbing through the wood above it, and anon reached the road under the Moir, along which his mother and the Merivale people would presently return from church to their homes. He sat on a great stone that overhung the way, and stared indifferently at the passers-by. Only when Jill Wickett, in her green dress, and Samuel Bolt appeared, did he show interest. Spring had no match for the peculiar shade of verdancy that Jill wore; but, none the less, she looked very handsome, and her beauty survived the ordeal of her gown. Sammy flushed as he caught sight of the man on the rock above him.

"There's that chap!" he whispered. "Come a bit quicker, an' look t'other way!"

But his sweetheart obeyed neither direction. She shook her skirts, slowed her gait, and deliberately stared into the frowning face of young Pomeroy. Their eyes met for some seconds, and his flashed furious, while hers affected scorn. Ives had time to sneer in the direction of Samuel Bolt and shrug his shoulders. He saw her

lips tighten at the insult and consequently found himself in a better temper after they had passed. As they retreated he heard the murmur of their voices and saw the man take out a white handkerchief and mop his forehead.

"'Tis like a red rat marrying a white mouse!" he said to himself. "Anyway, I wish 'em both hell of it; and 'tis likely enough he'll get hell, if she don't."

Lizzie and the schoolmaster next passed. His sister looked mournfully up at Ives. Then he dropped a lump of damp moss on Mr. Brown's shining, chimney-pot hat, much to the owner's annoyance.

"You ought to know better, Ives—such silly monkey tricks—Easter Sunday and all," said the other man, as he took off his hat and cleaned its crown.

"And you ought to know better than wear a foolish thing like that on your head—Sunday or no Sunday," shouted his future brother-in-law, as Lizzie and her betrothed went on.

Then Peter Toop appeared with Matthew Northmore. The farmer ignored Ives, but Mr. Toop improved the occasion. His brother and others from Merivale followed; then came Ruth Rendle alone. To her Ives condescended to be gracious and give "good-morning." She answered cheerfully and told him that she was coming to drink tea with his mother. As she went on her way, Ives regarded her slight figure and contrasted Ruth with Jill to the latter's advantage. In his eyes most women seemed bloodless, cold, and uninteresting beside Jill—since she had refused him. His loss was thus beaten back into his mind, and when Mr. Codd presently passed in review beneath him, darkness had returned to the soul of Ives.

Emanuel glanced up at his master without enthusiasm, and the other insulted him.

"Don't you look at me with that expression, you ugly old ape," he said.

"Don't want to look at you," retorted the head man;

" you'm no pleasant sight for a Christian soul, Ives Pomeroy. To be numbered with the Sabbath-breakers, and such a bringing up—'tis enough to make angels weep—sitting there like a wild creature that don't know Sunday from week-days."

" No need to tell that twaddle to me."

" Every need, I should reckon. Though 'tis always in at one ear and out at the other with you, when anybody talks sense."

" Get along home, dog," said Ives; then he saw his mother coming with old Rachel Bolt, and he descended and met them. They moved slowly, for the elder woman was lame with rheumatism. But she prattled cheerfully of the future according to her custom, and Avisa listened.

" Come autumn he takes her, and I'm wishful to have a little fuss about it, for never was a more popular man in Merivale than my Sam. His house be too small for a party, and even with mine, t'other side of the way, we couldn't manage very vitty; but down to *The Jolly Huntsmen* it can be done, and the Toops be going to arrange the spread."

This much Ives heard, then, flashing lightnings on the grey head of Mrs. Bolt, he departed and reached home some time before his mother.

He blamed her bitterly when she returned for listening to these details; he also let it be known that he should quarrel with any member of the family who went to the wedding; then he became calmer, and made a very good meal.

" Is there ought between you and Matthew Northmore? " Avisa said to him presently. " I've asked him to drop in this afternoon, for I like the man very well, and he's terrible lonely to Stone Park; but, when I put it to him, he said as he didn't think whether you'd care about it."

" I don't care one way or t'other," answered her son. " Northmore's not my sort. For that matter, none of

the people you like ever be my sort; but I go my way, and seek the kind that understand me—them that don't waste their time preaching or pulling long faces. He's a bit too pious and particular for me. They fox-hunters be so wonnerful self-righteous most times. What they do is always right; but if another man has his own ideas about sport and larger opinions than them, then of course he's wrong and sure to go to the devil. However, he's welcome here if you like him."

"I don't know whether he'll come. But he's a very good man, and so was his father before him," she answered.

"Be you well enough for the tea-party, mother?" asked Lizzie, and Mrs. Pomeroy assured her that she was.

Now Matthew Northmore had not intended to accept the invitation, but that happened which changed his mind. He heard that Ruth was to drink tea with the Pomeroys, and the remote possibility of walking back to Merivale with her afterwards decided him.

He appeared, therefore, at Vixen Tor and behaved graciously to Ives, when that young man appeared in the parlour and took his place at the tea-table.

Conversation was general and of local matters. But presently old Jane Pomeroy beckoned to Ruth and they talked aside together, while Avisa had speech with the master of Stone Park. Lizzie and her sweetheart looked at a family album of photographs together, and Ives left the company, but not before he invited Northmore to climb up Vixen Tor and visit his private holt aloft in the rocks. Matthew, however, refused, with an allusion to his best clothes. Then, when the young man was gone, Mrs. Pomeroy discussed her son and warned Northmore to be charitable in his judgments.

"Be sure I am, ma'am," he answered gloomily. "I'd judge no child of yours unkindly. But we've got to rate a man by his friends, not by his mother. I'm not his

keeper, but I'm not his friend neither. For the reason that he wouldn't let me be. He's said a good few very rude things to me——"

Northmore broke off and looked towards Ruth Rendle.

"My son is in a bad way just now, along of having lost Wickett's daughter. She chose a more restful pattern of man."

"Who shall blame her?"

"Nobody. Only if you knew what he feels——"

Matthew admitted that at such a time any man must be gently dealt with.

"Perhaps I've been too short and taken the rash, rude things he said too serious. We must allow for a lot where a man's smarting under that. If he'd only work, however. Nought cleanses the mind like work, in my opinion. 'Tis a very sad and dangerous thing to waste such a lot of his precious hours."

"So I say," chimed in the schoolmaster. "It's not only sad and dangerous: it's wrong to the world at large. I've thought out most economic questions for myself, I may tell you. To waste time is to rob the community. The man who wastes time is a deliberate thief, if you look at it right. In my classes I punish laziness as sharply as it is possible."

"'Tis a great blessing to be fond of work," admitted the mother, "but some of the best men I've known in the world hated it; and some of the kindest, pleasantest folk ever I've met with didn't stand to work more than they could help."

"I despise a man who doesn't, all the same," declared Northmore, and Arthur Brown agreed with him. All seemed astonished that Mrs. Pomeroy could view this alarming trait in her son so leniently.

"You of all people—such a worker as you are, mother!" exclaimed Lizzie.

"I'm quick to my work, but not specially fond of doing

it," confessed Avisa. "There be some love to mess along all day and make martyrs of theirselves and never be done. And they get the credit of being terrible hard-working, instead of only terrible slow-working. My husband larned me that. He used time like a master. Ives be so quick as a bird building her nest when he takes a task in hand serious. A swift mind he has."

"Wish you could keep him off that bad old man Cawker," said Northmore. "It won't come to good—his seeing such a lot of a poacher."

"I wish I could with all my heart. I'm quite with you there. But I don't know how."

"It wouldn't be at all an unlikely thing if that Moleskin, as they call him, was caught red-handed and sent to prison some day," declared the schoolmaster. "I almost wish it would happen—for the sake of the lesson to Ives."

"Too old—too old for such crooked ways—nearly twenty-five, they tell me. 'Tis an age when he ought to take a graver view of life," continued Northmore.

Mrs. Pomeroy listened patiently; then she rose and went to the women by the fire.

"Another cup of tea, mother?" she asked; but Jane did not immediately answer. She was talking very earnestly with Ruth. Now she broke off and addressed Avisa.

"I doubt you won't be interested, my dear. Ruth and me was having a bit of a tell about the next world, but I always say you'm so wrapped up in this one, that you don't think enough 'pon the next. Now I be different; at my age 'tis right I should be. 'Tis my boast that I live with the Book in reach and never let the sun go down without having read one chapter in the Old Testament and two chapters in the New. Year in, year out, I do it."

"Bless your heart, yes, you do. If we all knowed the Word like you, mother!"

"Yet it ban't all so clear as I could wish, for all my reading," confessed Jane Pomeroy.

"Puzzles there always will be. No two Christians can read the book quite alike," said Avisa. "Maybe that's part of the wonder of it."

"Just so," declared the ancient woman. "Ruth here —for my comfort—was saying as there would be no grey hairs in Heaven; but I make bold to hope she'm quite mistaken there. Think of me, for instance, at my time of life, in a gay place full of nought but hopeful young folk as never grow tired and never want rest. I should be lost, I'm sure."

"But you'll be young again yourself, my old dear!" declared Ruth.

"Nay, nay, missy. I'd much rather not. Avisa here, as be on the way, too, will bear me out in that. Us have had our springtime and don't hanker for another. Us have had what no Heaven can give us again—to say it humbly—haven't us, Avisa?"

"Yes, truly we have," admitted the other. "Heaven's self can't do all that earth can. For why? We shall be changed."

"Heaven's self won't come up to my courting days with Thomas Pomeroy," declared old Jane. "Heaven's self won't give the feeling that I had when my first baby put his little lips over my heart. I don't expect it, and I don't ax it. I'd wish for me and my man both to be on the edge of age there—old like without aches and ills—old without sleepless nights and sad thoughts about them in their graves—just old and peaceful and together in some corner of Heaven. And no trouble to nobody; and the childer to look in from time to time with the news of their childer. I pray it can be done; but time will show."

"'Twould puzzle the Lord to think of anything more beautiful than that. 'Tis the best He could do, I'm sure," declared Ruth with her young eyes glistening. Avisa noticed the emotion, but herself showed none.

"The best that God can do! There's a thought," she said. "And 'tis all summed up in the word 'Heaven.'"

Later that evening Northmore had his desire, and left Vixen Tor beside the woman he loved. Mrs. Pomeroy saw him depart and watched the pair thoughtfully upon their road. Then came the happiest moment of her day.

Ives appeared.

"Be I to go to evening prayer along with you, mother?" he asked.

"I'll get my bonnet," she said. "'Tis time we was starting, boy."

Her son's mood had changed. The Vixen often calmed him, and it had done so to-day.

"Did you see the fashion that fool—Northmore, I mean—looked at Ruth Rendle when she was drinking her tea?" he asked.

"Yes, Ives."

"I know the signs—worse luck. I could almost feel sorry for the man if he wasn't so stiff and hard. He'll never court a girl right—ban't built to do it. Another thing: she don't care a brass button for the chap. I know enough of 'em to see that very clear."

"A very good, high-principled man."

"Of course—everybody is—but me and Moleskin. He may be all you say; but he's dry as a dead bone. For that matter, I don't see much in Ruth Rendle myself."

"I do. You're so fond of the girls, that I wonder you don't take to her."

"Not me—a regular old maid, I believe."

"Don't you think it! They'm only like old maids where they'm not interested. I could be frosty myself at her age—frost in the morning and fire in the afternoon."

He laughed.

"As to Ruth, she's the best wife hid in a maiden as I've met this many a year, Ives. She's patient, she's brave,

she's got a heart. That's to say a lot for a young creature."

"Don't seem young to me," he declared. "Always appears awful old and awful slow to see a joke."

"Mend your jokes, then," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "The fault's more like to be in them than in her. And mind you sing out the hymns to-night. I love to hear 'e."

CHAPTER IX

A WEDDING

WALLA rises in midmost Moor near Tavy Head by Cut Hill. It is a region very remote, and she has travelled many miles before any sign of civilization can be seen upon her banks; then, in scattered colonies, the ruined homes of neolithic men appear beside her, and lower still, under the eastward sweep of Great Staple Tor, stands a human dwelling of to-day.

Stone Park, the farm of Matthew Northmore, was surrounded by grassland reclaimed from the waste; but at this season the cattle were far afield until winter; the hay meadows were shorn; there was little work upon the land. Northmore did not cultivate anything but hay. His other necessary winter crops he purchased from his neighbours of the "in country." Leisure, therefore, often fell to him, and, on a day in autumn, he prepared to leave his somewhat lonely and lifeless farm that he might spend certain hours in the company of his kind.

The man's romance stood still from one point of view, though since fire cannot remain stationary, in a vital particular the first object of his heart lived by what it fed on and kept him burning. Thrice he had reached the moment of declaration to find himself tongue-tied; he had written many letters, only to feel that they did not state his case to the best possible advantage. This paralysis of will was based upon external knowledge rather than upon inherent character. Northmore in most affairs of life found himself unwavering. He belonged to the section of mankind that knows its own mind. But for one fact he had not thus delayed or proved so fearful before the necessary ordeal. It was Ruth Rendle's attitude towards him that

arrested action. A man, always somewhat unduly sensitive, here found himself compact of sensibility, and his intuition told him clearly that he had not yet won her. She was always gracious, always attentive and always kind; but with a grace, attention, and friendship that she denied to none. Between them there existed none of that delicious, secret understanding over trifles, none of those little private jests or special interchanges of thought that his instinct told him should ere now have arisen.

He was entirely outside her life. He felt that had she reciprocated in any degree his fervour, that had she found in him a kindred spirit, their relations must unconsciously have ripened, until a final declaration of love came as the sweet, sure fruit of the flower of friendship. But no such thing happened. She was to him as she had been when first she stood behind the bar of *The Jolly Huntsmen;* and this knowledge produced infirmity of purpose in him and kept him dumb against his stern, native inclination to speak and be answered. He told himself that he was a coward; he strove to find out the reason, if any existed, why she did not grow a little more tender and confiding; and first he blamed himself; and then, as a thing easier to do but not the less distracting, he blamed another. With observation immensely sharpened by his condition, he watched Ruth's attitude to the rest of the world. On her stage behind the counter he marked her play her part, and noted small circumstances, trivial turns of neck, intonations of voice, glances of eye. First he was relieved to discover—nothing. Then he was thrown into the extremity of anger and of grief; because he pierced her secret, as a skilled physician pierces the secret of the patient, or a swift-eyed boy marks the nest and renders the bird's inherited system of concealment pathetic before superior intelligence. None but Matthew Northmore guessed that this woman hid a secret love for a man; and he, by the special light of his own heart, discovered this

fact. At first he believed it; and then he fought with himself to disbelieve; at first he saw a thousand signs following upon the earliest; then he declared himself self-deluded, insane. For a little he even fooled himself to think that his own fear was father to the discovery.

Now, on the day when Samuel Bolt proposed to marry Jill Wickett, the farmer at last reached a condition of exasperation and concern that demanded settlement. His whole existence craved to hear the truth. He felt that he must starve if the definite word was longer withheld. Any letter, from the present agitated standpoint, looked too mean and spiritless a machinery for his great purpose; therefore, as he dressed to go to the wedding, he decided that before the week was ended he would ask Ruth to marry him.

Five and forty people attended the marriage ceremony at Sampford Spiney, and seventeen subsequently appeared at Merivale, where the Toops had arranged a wedding breakfast which was long remembered by those fortunate enough to attend it.

Much to the anger of Ives Pomeroy, his mother accepted her invitation, and Avisa's place at the banquet was on the right hand of Rachel Bolt. In addition to the married couple there also appeared Ruth Rendle, Matthew Northmore, one James Bonus, who acted as best man, Emanuel Codd and other friends and relations, including the parents and the young brothers and sisters of the bride.

Peter and Joel Toop waited upon their guests. They performed this duty at all occasions of an entertainment in *The Jolly Huntsmen;* but to-day they marked their equality with those they served by an easy manner throughout the meal, and a free interchange of raillery and conversation with the assembled company.

The great feature of the banquet had been reached: a course of six ducks. Hard breathing resounded at the table, together with universal clink and clatter; but Mrs.

Pomeroy and old Mrs. Bolt did not want duck: they talked instead while the company ate.

"How his manly voice uttered the words!" said Rachel. "My boy's, I mean. Parson's speech was a mere twittering compared to his. The ring once belonged to Sam's gossip—old Sally Slatter. 'Twas left to him under her will when she died, with a hope that he'd wed his wife with it. And so he did; but he put on the new one as he'd bought hisself so soon as all was over. Didn't her look fine coming down the aisle after the signing? But I'm sorry to say Sam let fall a terrible gert blot in the church book just following his name. 'Twas that silly man, Bonus, jogged his elbow."

"The service went very suent," declared Avisa. "As orderly and pleasant a wedding as ever I was at."

"I wish your young people had been there—not Ives—couldn't expect that—wouldn't have been in human nature. But Lizzie might have come."

"Her young man didn't care for it."

"Oh! Why for not, Avisa?"

"Better ax him, if you're interested."

"Not I. I've no thought for any but my own two. Thank God, I can say that honestly. She'll be a real daughter to me. They'm off to Exeter for the honeymoon. Samuel isn't the man to spoil such a thing for a pound or two. And I be going to get the house all ship-shape against they come home."

"Don't do too much. 'Twill only be a challenge to her to undo it again. These young creatures have their own opinions, and they'm almost always different to ours."

Peter Toop paid special attention to the bride. He revolved round her as though she were an idol and he a worshipper. Port and sherry from the cellar of *The Jolly Huntsmen* flowed freely with the duck, and the low, long room exhaled their mingled odours. Then came pud-

dings and sweetmeat, whose appearance won a chorus of praise.

"Be blessed if I ever seed such a masterpiece!" declared Mr. Bonus. "That wasn't made in Merivale, I'll swear."

"You'll swear wrong then," answered Joel Toop, who brought in a great dish and set it down tenderly. "'Twas Ruth here invented the idea, and she and cook carried it out as you see. And anybody refusing to eat 'em will make a hole in their manners!"

He referred to twenty twin hearts made of pastry and filled with whortleberries and cream.

"Have half a glass more, Mrs. Pomeroy," urged Peter with the port.

"I'll have a whole glass," she said. "'Tis very pretty drinking and old as the hills, I'll wager."

"A beautiful, rich, and feeding wine," admitted Mr. Toop. "Plenty more where that came from. Port isn't in the front rank as it used to be; but there's nothing like it for lifting up the heart. I'll grant you champagne does the same and maybe quicker, and we've got a good bottle of that, too, for them that want it; but champagne lets you down again almost so quick as the gas is out of your body; whereas with a beverage like this, the force of it bides corked up in the innards for days so to say. 'Tis a clinging wine, and the deeper you go in the bottle, the more there is *to* it, if you understand me."

There were no speeches, though several urged the bridegroom to say a few words. His remarks, however, amounted to no more than a hope that the company would not make him and his wife miss their train.

"To hear him talk about his 'wife' so beautiful and proud!" whispered Mrs. Bolt to Mr. Wickett, the bride's father.

"Hope he always will," answered the man.

Matthew Northmore sat next to Ruth, and in that was

blessed; but little came of it. He pressed her to eat of everything and ate well himself.

Jill rated him for not drinking her health in anything stronger than ginger-beer. She was very talkative through the meal and very much at her ease. This fact Codd noted and commented upon rather sourly to Jill's second sister.

"'Tis more like a widow being married than a maiden, in my opinion," he said. "Whatever vartues she've got, shyness ban't one of 'em."

As the young pair departed, Jill's last words were to her mother-in-law. She shook the rice out of her clothes, kissed Mrs. Bolt warmly, and spoke:

"Don't you unpack my box and parcels, mind. I'd sooner do it myself when I come home this day week. They'm all right. And don't you be too busy for us, there's a dear. 'Tis for me to come over and look after you now."

"No, no, Jill. You've got to think of him—not me. He must take all your time—all of it. I'm hopeful that the first thing as you do will be four new flannel shirts for him. Trust your clever fingers! You've got to cure his winter cough, Jill!"

"Time's up!" said Samuel. "God bless you, mother. You won't be out of our thoughts much, I promise you."

He stooped and kissed her.

"I wish you was coming, too!" he whispered, so that none else could hear him.

Then Jill and Samuel drove off, while Peter Toop flung a shoe after them. But he missed the carriage and nearly hit a handsome white goose that stood and cackled with a row of butter-coloured goslings on the edge of the common.

Anon, after Mrs. Bolt's tears had been dried, the men adjourned to the skittle alley, and the brothers Toop sat down to their own well-earned repast. Ruth served them and Avisa took pleasure in helping her. She was now free, because Rachel Bolt began to turn all her attention to the mother of Jill.

Peter rolled his eyes a good deal over the meal, drank deep, and found himself in a highly sentimental state of mind.

"This business brings it home with terrible force," he confessed to Mrs. Pomeroy. "I mean the loneliness of the single state. 'Tis time, and more than time, the plunge was taken. The need for a wife gains cruel on me."

"You'm so busy: you'll never give yourself a minute to look round," said she.

"But what if I have?" he answered; and presently, alone with the mother, he permitted himself to hint at his hopes.

"What do you think of Ruth?" he asked, as he took snuff without due care and let the powder fall freely about his person and impregnate the air.

Mrs. Pomeroy sneezed and her eyes watered.

"You know what I think of her. She's the best maiden I've seen for many a long day—the right sort—a treasure."

"Exactly; and that's what I say. Could I do better, Mrs. Pomeroy? Be frank."

"Far too elderly you are, my dear—far too elderly."

"Only at first sight," argued Peter. "I'm a much younger man than anybody knows but myself, and I feel years younger than the almanac makes me. But Ruth, on the other hand, is old for her age. In fact, there's a mistake. She believes that she is twenty-one. I say, without unkindness, that she can't be a day less than twenty-five or six. But what does that matter? Be it as it will, I've a feeling that she's the wife for me, and I hope if you can say a word in my favour, you'll take the opportunity."

Avisa nodded.

"None can say anything not in your favour. But your usual sense is out here. Look round for somebody as old again as Ruth. You'll do wiser to."

Peter showed impatience in his reply.

"A woman never can understand how young a man

feels. 'Tis only my beard that makes you say this. If 'twas away—and my hair back—why, I should look no more than a ripe man. And that's all I am. I don't want some old maid as have been in the market twenty years, I promise you! With my business and saved money, I've every right to seek something nicer. If you was speaking to Joel, 'twould be different. He's what you might call 'elderly,' though once on his pony, even he's spry enough still."

"What does he say?"

"On this subject he says nought, because I don't give him the chance to. 'Tis too delicate. Sometimes I almost think he's got matrimony in his own mind, and I speak against it, in a general way—to warn him off. At his age the risks are too great. However, I'm very different, and, in a word, I shall ask her without 'by your leave' to anybody."

"'Tis a free country."

"And if she says 'no,' I won't deny to you that 'twill make a difference in my feeling for her. In such a matter it must be allowed I know better than she can. 'Twould be very lacking in dignity for a man of my position to get 'no' for an answer. A most improper thing."

"Don't you run the risk, Peter. She's very well as she is; and so be you."

"There's such a thing as love," said Mr. Toop, with the air of a discoverer. "You can't deny it to anybody; and because I haven't felt it till now, that's no reason why I shouldn't feel it at all. In fact, the feeling gets matured with age—like liquor. My bosom swells at the thought of taking her. It will be no common trial, I assure you, if she's wrong-headed about it."

The matter dropped and Peter asked kindly after Mrs. Pomeroy's health.

"'Tis all right, I believe. Say nothing about it," she answered.

Elsewhere Joel himself and Mr. Bonus watched the skittle-players, and discussed the event of the day. The latter played a German concertina that he might impart an air of festivity to the afternoon; and between the tunes he uttered his opinions.

"Makes a man soft-like to the females," declared the musician. "To watch Mr. Peter hovering round the bride—why, 'twas like an old cock-sparrow after a butterfly."

"I am sorry he made himself so foolish," confessed Joel. "Peter don't know how sad it is to see a grey beard along with the maidens. 'Tis the weakness of age creeping upon him. There's only one course open that I can see; and that I shall take."

"What might that be?"

"Marry myself," said Joel firmly. "As the younger and livelier man, it is my duty. What is seemly in me is very painful in Peter. I must marry, Bonus; indeed, I'm a marrying man and ripe for it any time these last few years. We're well to do and an heir must be raised up. Once I'm the father of a brave boy or two, and there'll be no more nonsense from Peter. It shall be done, mark me. The next wedding feast you sit down to at *The Jolly Huntsmen* may be mine."

"I'd much sooner think 'twas going to be mine," declared Mr. Bonus. "For that matter, I know a very proper party."

After tea the company broke up, and Avisa Pomeroy walked home with Emanuel Codd.

"Why for wouldn't Lizzie and schoolmaster come to the wedding?" he asked. "I heard a good few ax why not. Of course with Ives 'twas understood."

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled.

"To be plain with you, Arthur Brown thought it a little under him to go. I laughed at the young man. But

there it is. A very serious habit of mind he's got. Do you know what'll happen when he marries our Lizzie?"

Mr. Codd sniffed.

"He'll be too high and mighty to come to his own wedding, belike?"

"No; but he'll not be sorry to get advancement and set up his staff and sign a bit further from his wife's people. 'Tis very natural in him, no doubt."

"I know the sort," said Codd spitefully. "Very grand and superior till a wagon-load of childer came; then they've no objection to let grandparents ease the work and take the young ones off their hands free gratis. There's nothing so damned selfish on this earth as the joyful parents of a quiver full. Maybe you'll find that out yet."

"Don't even a wedding make you feel kinder to folk?" she asked.

"Not Merivale folk," he answered. "There's more knaves and fools to the square mile in these parts than ever I heard of anywhere outside the Bible. Take they Toops—each pretending he's younger than t'other, and each fancying his brother have got a foot in the grave. Whenever was seen such a pair of born naturals? For my part I believe they be twins and a lot nearer a hundred years old than fifty. Nasty old men, both of 'em. I wouldn't trust either of 'em."

"Who would you trust—come now?"

"I'd trust you," he answered. "Same as I trusted your husband afore you; same as I trust God A'mighty to lift the sun at dayspring. But for the rest, except my own self and a sheep-dog or two, I'd trust nought living."

CHAPTER X

THE LONE STONES

Among memorials of neolithic man still scattered on these western wastes, where once he lived and laboured, there shall be found circles of unhewed stones flung here and there in sequestered regions and above the union of rivers. Many similar relics have vanished, and, in ignorance, the moor-folk of yesterday tore up a thousand evidences of the later Stone Age to build their "new-take" walls or mend their roads; but a few significant fragments have escaped, and these old-time granite cartularies still stand in sequestered regions; still strike the sudden wanderer with interest or awe, in measure of his own mental equipment; still tell of the morning of human society, when men had begun to gather themselves together, appoint rulers, establish laws, and fear the dead. Already, in their shadows that never left them, in their reflections upon still waters, in their dreams, and in their hours of sickness and delirium, they had reached a theory of their own double natures; and thence arose religion's dawn: belief in the ancestral spirit. As yet the dead stood to them in place of deity. Not until a period far later did man make God in his own image and lift his prayer to conscious forces hidden behind the hurricane and thunder cloud, the sunrise and the sea.

Langstone Moor stretches to the northwest of Great Mis Tor, and lies thick with traces of these vanished people. Beside Walla shall be found many of their ruined homes; elsewhere stands that menhir, or long stone, which names this waste and betokens the spot where a stone hero is sleeping; while between the tomb and the village shall be seen a cirque of sixteen stones, that lies upon the hill

to dominate heath, morass, and ambient hills with its own mysterious significance.

The boulders form a ring; they rise suddenly, like magic creatures, upon the vision of the wanderer; they come as some sleight and unreal trick of the desert, and lift themselves out of nothing. At one moment the enduring and featureless fabric of the Moor surrounds a chance spectator; in the next he stands startled before the silent company of the Lone Stones. Lifted here by the labour of a departed race, their mystery is hidden, their secret is shrouded perhaps forever; yet those best skilled in prehistoric story judge that they stand for ceremonial and suspect that within these circles the dead were brought to final rites of fire before they sank into their urns and were deposited far from the homes of the living. Poignant terror of the departed belonged as a large factor to primeval superstitions, and the monolith and menhir, the cairn and its kist, lie on mountain tops or hallowed hills remote from the homes of the quick. Their ossuaries were haunted, and primal man feared his ghosts, even as present men may love them.

Viewed on a day of late August against the purple background of Great Mis Tor, the Lone Stones glimmered under sunshine and lacked much of that mystic and foreboding air that oftentimes hung over them at times of fleeting mist, in dawn and evening twilights, or during the darkness of night and storm. Scarcely a cloud dimmed the September blue; the air danced along the immense planes of the Moor; cattle roamed far off, yet their frequent presence within the circle was manifest, for upon more than one of the old stones might be seen flecks of red, black, and dun hair from the wandering herds that here sometimes gathered to ruminate and rub their hides against the granite. The circle continued its vigil of ages, subject only to Time's tireless hand. It had witnessed events that living man may never learn. It had, perchance,

seen the gathering of the clans and been a rialto as well as a temple. Some of the fragments were sharp; some were solid; some looked like hooded wights, that bent here under weight of years or ardour of prayer; some reared indifferent; some threatened to fall; and to-day, not for the first time, they compassed within their brooding circuit a miserable man. The haunting boulders unconsciously added to his gloom by their inexorable and oblivious demeanour, yet he made no effort to depart from them. He lay along beneath the largest, and not the murmur of Walla far below, not the cry of distant kine, not the breath of the wind upon the heath could change his mood, lift his heart, or challenge his misery. He envied his brothers of dust assembled round him. He felt that the stones were superior to him, by reason of their impassivity and freedom from grief. Henceforth he must be himself a stone—but a living one.

Here lay Matthew Northmore and, a mile distant, with a white face and beating heart, a woman hastened from him and mourned that she had stricken him with such unutterable sorrow. That he had spoiled her own little holiday was a sort of consolation for Ruth. She felt it right to suffer, because she had made another suffer.

That morning she had played truant and told her kinsmen they must attend to the inn themselves. She had taken a pasty and a basket, then set out for the Moor to live through one day alone with her thoughts. She went, indeed, to gather whortleberries; but the fruit was an excuse for a holiday. On her way the girl passed behind Stone Park, and Northmore saw her. He let her go a mile into the loneliness, then braced himself to his delayed task, followed and offered himself and all that he had.

She had refused tenderly, almost regretfully. But there was no hesitation in her answer, no ground for hope that time would change her conviction. He believed that he knew why, and felt almost tempted to reveal his knowl-

edge; but he was a man, and his misery could not at this stage of life sink him below his manhood. Ruth cared for Ives Pomeroy and Matthew had discovered it. As yet none knew it besides himself. It may be doubted if the girl herself quite realized the truth. But Northmore had done so and, to-day, while her eternal "no" tolled in his heart, every thought and instinct bore upon that fatal discovery.

For the time he was merely miserable above the common lot and knew not what must come of it. He possessed some force of character; but full share of elementary leaven blended therewith. There came to him, during the hours of that sun-filled day, strange thoughts bred of this tribulation. To a seeing eye, from the dust of the bygone people again arose their stubborn spirits to join hands with Northmore through the centuries, and inform this living being with their primitive determination and ferocity. Here, perhaps, where now he sprawled his forlorn carcass, great fires had swallowed the limbs of great men. Here, under the earth that his body covered, there might still repose the ashes of the mighty ones. And did their deathless parts—the ghosts of their greatness—still haunt the glimpses of the noonday and move like a presence through the heat haze of summer and the hail-storm of spring?

To the man now came the lust of wrath and the hate of loss. He played the casuist and argued upon the event. A subtlety not native woke from the prick of his sorrow and inspired him. He told himself that this was not the end; that she must be disabused; that only lasting failure, disappointment and unhappiness could ever come to her from love of Ives Pomeroy; that the quicker such an idol was flung in dust at her feet, the better for her content and peace of mind. He argued that any course of action embracing this revelation for Ruth was doubly and trebly justified. First her future might be saved thereby;

secondly (and this was vital to his own conscience) exposure could not hurt the other man, because Ives did not love Ruth. He dinned this repeatedly into himself to still an inevitable uneasiness. That the woman should be made to see the truth of Ives Pomeroy was only kindness to her; but it was no unkindness or injustice to Pomeroy, since he and his affections and interests were not concerned with her. The phrase "the truth of Ives Pomeroy" presently recurred to Matthew's mind somewhat sternly. He was even just enough to ask himself whether he knew the truth of Ives Pomeroy. But he was not just enough, under his present storm of soul, to answer justly. He told himself that he did know all any man needed to know; that Pomeroy was very obviously not destined to make a woman happy; that even his own mother confessed as much. What a sensible woman like Avisa could admit concerning her son was enough. Northmore saw his road clearly in so far as the immediate course of it extended. As for its goal, he could but hope that her secret regard for Ives once destroyed and its ruin removed from Ruth's mind, he might yet fill the empty place.

Some sort of desolate peace crowned this conclusion. He rose, when the Lone Stones cast long shadows easterly over the ruddy heath, and sunset flames burnt red as the pyres of old amongst them. He went his way with primal passions masked by modern intelligence. Essential, immemorial, emotions battled with the ages of mental evolution, and even conquered them. For a brief moment of time they dragged Northmore's whole being back to harmony with the spirits that had heaved up these stones; to kinship with those bygone ones, who came to dwell amid the Moor's stern verities, and with them brought their own palœolithic heritage of still earlier instincts.

He departed at last, vanished in fading light, and left the Lone Stones to their solemn and eternal conference.

Matthew found no escape from his mind for many days; yet with time his nature returned nearer to itself and he banished certain thoughts of action against his rival. There came an opportunity to do the other evil; but Northmore easily resisted the temptation to take it.

As for Ruth, her immediate concern was banished swiftly, and erratic chance, not content with throwing one man at her feet, thrust upon her the proposal of a second before that day was done.

It happened that Mr. Peter Toop left home after tea upon the mournful business of his trade. A farmer had died suddenly at Okehampton, and his wife, being a Merivale woman and proposing to return there, sent for Mr. Toop in her sorrow, that she might make him her friend and arrange with him other matters besides the immediate interment.

Peter went off for the night and proposed to stop at Okehampton until the following afternoon. Joel, therefore, though not actually of opinion that the moment was ripe, felt such an opportunity too good to lose. When the bar closed, he stopped Ruth as she was going to her room and invited her to join him while he smoked a pipe.

"I know you've been out on the Moor and are tired," he said. "But there's nothing like a bit of news for making us forget weary limbs. Bring in a glass of lemonade for yourself and a drop of whisky for me. I've got something very interesting to tell you, Ruth."

She had not yet thought of sleep, for her mind ran much upon the Lone Stones and a sorrowful man left standing amongst them. She remembered how, looking back from some distance, she had marked that he stood no more, but had sunk down upon the ground, as if such tribulation was too terrible to be borne upright.

Joel smoked his pipe and drew out a comfortable chair for Ruth. He began by remarking casually that he had not felt so well, or so young, for many years. Then, from

force of habit, he expressed a wish that Peter enjoyed like vigour and a regret that he did not. Ruth drank her lemonade, folded her hands in her lap, and waited for him to tell her the interesting news. Presently she raised a small palm and yawned behind it.

At this signal of impatience, Joel took up his parable. He had planned the campaign and his line of attack lay very clearly before him. He felt exceedingly interested in pending operations, but not at all nervous or doubtful of the issue. Mr. Toop's heart was neither sanguine nor fearful, but merely assured. He argued his chances on practical business principles, and found that there could be only one answer from a woman so sensible and so utterly dependent as Ruth. She was penniless; and he opened the discussion by reminding her delicately of that fact.

"'Twas a thousand pities your father never insured his life—a man so careful and wise in most respects," he said.

"Yes, it was," she admitted.

"However, no use crying over spilled milk. You can't help being without means, and after all, in my opinion, you've got what's far better than a small income, and that's a big bump of common sense. I don't say it in flattery, Ruth; 'tis no more than your due. You'll allow that I'm a judge of what common sense means."

"I'm sure you are."

"For a man who may justly be called young yet, I think I've got my share. Peter's seen it in me, and allowed it these many years. He's different. Though so much older, there's a wilful way with him—almost a skittish attitude to the serious affairs of life. It's the result of his business, I think. He wants relief from the coffins, and goes to the other extreme and puts on a boyish way that's rather unfortunate in an elderly man—to say it kindly. But I've always felt glad that he didn't marry. I don't think he was cut out for it, Ruth."

"He talks of it as a thing he'll do for certain presently."

"I know. That's his light nature. There was a widow lived home by us ten year ago, and he was always rolling his eyes at her. There's no dignity to Peter—good as gold though he is, and my brother. I dare say that you've marked the difference in our characters, so quick as you are?"

"I like you both, and I'm very grateful to you both."

"So you should be; though I won't tell you which of us it was thought of bringing you here against the arguments in favour of a professional barmaid. However, you can guess, I dare say. Charity has always been second nature to me, Ruth. Some come to it with an effort; some never do; and to some it's just their ordinary bent of mind—as in my case. And this I will say, when you came to *The Jolly Huntsmen*, me and Peter entertained an angel unawares. You'll allow that's pretty handsome praise, I think."

"You're too good to me—both of you."

"Not too good at all. I'm full of ideas about you, and, all in good time, you'll know them. But one of these ideas is such a whacker, so to say, that it quite swallows up all the rest, like Aaron's rod swallowed up the magicians, you know. Anyway, it's this tremendous thought that's come to me, and to-night I'm going to put it before you; and I warn you 'twill banish sleep."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait for Mr. Peter?"

"No," said Joel shortly. "It would not. Don't keep dragging him in. This has got nothing whatever to do with Peter—not directly, that is. Indirectly it may mean a lot to him. But my object in speaking to-day is to put it all clear and have it settled before brother comes back. So don't mention his name again, please."

"I won't then."

"Thank you. Now the question is my position in the world. Ruth, you must know that I'm very well to do.

I've a half share in this business, and the poultry and pig-farm is all mine. Between ourselves, I get a bit more out of my eggs and bacon than Peter does by his coffins. As to my age, in confidence I may tell you that I am many years younger than people suppose. The exact figure has escaped me, but if you said forty-five, you would probably be much nearer the mark than you might have the least idea. Now the time has come when in the fulness of my manhood I am looking round for a helpmate. To put it in a nutshell: I have looked and I have found!"

"Really? I'm so glad, cousin Joel!"

"You'll be gladder still when you know who 'tis. But I don't want to startle you. 'Tis no use trying to make you guess, so I'll tell you. But first, better take a sip out of my glass to hearten yourself against the surprise."

"No need. How quiet you've kept your courting! I can't for the life of me think who 'tis."

"As to courting," said Mr. Toop, "I've my own ideas on that subject, and I can't say I've ever felt any respect for they philandering sort of fellows who stream about after young women and are never further off from 'em than the rim of their petticoats. 'Tis a feeble-minded and an improper occupation for any young man to be hanging about the females on the chance of getting a sensible she to like him. At least that's my opinion. No; I set to work very different. I let the women see the man I am and my manlike view of life. I'm too busy getting up my name in the world to be wasting their time and mine with love-making—so-called. First let a maiden understand what you are; then, if you feel she'd make you a proper wife, go boldly and offer to take her. Don't go empty-handed. Tell her how you stand—in figures, if need be; and also tell her that what's yours is hers—so long as she does her part of the bargain. It's a great deal to say, but she must justify it. That's my idea of love.

Courting is a silly matter that can fill up the spare time afterwards; but I hope I'm not light-minded enough to waste my hours that way, and I hope the woman I'm going to offer myself to thinks the same."

He stopped for breath.

"Do you guess who 'tis?" he asked.

"For the life of me I can't," she answered. "Not a Merivale woman surely?"

"Yes and no."

"I can't guess. Tell me quick."

"Like your modesty not to guess. But, of course, you never would have. If you'd guessed right, I should have been almost too shocked to go on with it. In a word then——"

He stopped, bent forward, and patted her shoulder at each syllable of his next sentence.

"I be going to marry a young woman by the name of Ruth Rendle—if she'll let me!"

Only for the briefest moment was the girl even regretful. Northmore's humble pleading returned to her thought. It reduced the present proposal to farce. Indeed, after the briefest silence, she actually laughed, and Joel was a good deal annoyed.

"Where's your manners?" he said sharply. "Did you hear me? If 'tis hysterics, of course that's different."

The possibility soothed him, but Ruth explained that it was not hysterics.

"Dear cousin Joel, how good and kind and large-minded to think of such a thing; but really—no, I couldn't do that. I don't feel 'twould be seemly somehow—even though you're younger than you look, as you say. In fact, I couldn't love you, cousin—not as you ought to be loved."

He stared at her and scratched his whiskers. His mouth remained slightly open and revealed teeth that did him no credit. His expression was one of genuine astonishment, and only gradually it changed to annoyance.

"You'd better think twice," he said. "I believe in these cases the maidenly instinct is often to refuse without really meaning it. But, mark me, there's a good few women mooning about to-day that be sorry to the soul because they said 'no' when they ought to have said 'yes.' There's a sort of men who take 'no' to mean 'no,' and ban't be built to hear that unpleasant word twice. I'm that sort of man. I've got my self-respect, I warn you, Ruth. I—but—there—think again. We'll take your answer as unsaid."

"Indeed but I meant it! I'm very proud that you could have even thought of me; but it couldn't be. I didn't answer in a hurry or without proper reflection, and I wouldn't hurt your self-respect for anything; but I couldn't marry you—under any possible circumstances."

He drank his whisky as though washing down a pill.

"So be it," he said. "I won't ask your reasons, because a woman's reasons—only one thing I've a right to say, and 'tis your duty to obey me."

"Gladly I'll obey you in all I can."

"You must promise on your solemn oath not to marry Peter. I've a right to order that."

"I will promise most faithfully not to marry him—even if he asks."

"You couldn't marry him if he didn't," snapped Mr. Toop. "Anyway, I believe that he will ask. I've seen foolish signs of late that he hadn't wit to hide. However, I've got your word. Now you'd better go to bed."

He was still much annoyed, and when she rose and extended her hand to him, he refused to take it.

"No," he said. "I don't find myself at all inclined to friendship. In fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, I'm a good bit niffed with you, Ruth Rendle. I thought your strong point was sense, and to-day you've done about the silliest thing that even a woman ever did do in my

knowledge. I'm not pleased, I'm not at all pleased—in fact, quite the contrary."

She sighed and left him then. But Joel's prophecies concerning her night's rest were unfulfilled, for she slept exceedingly well and only woke out of untroubled, dreamless slumber at the clarion of Mr. Toop's poultry.

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING PHEASANTS

MOLESKIN'S house, which stood midway between Princetown and Merivale, was set into the side of a hill a quarter of a mile from the road, and more resembled the habitation of a cave-dweller than the home of a civilized being. It looked like some gigantic and suspicious live creature with its head thrust through a hole, yet ready to dive back into the earth at a moment's warning. Two small windows glimmered under a straw roof, and upon the thatch heavy stones were laid to keep the winter storms from blowing all away. The door of Mr. Cawker's abode was of a bright scarlet colour, thanks to a pot of paint the owner had somehow or somewhere acquired. It flamed across the Moor and presented a very conspicuous spectacle. Moleskin declared that no dishonest man would have adorned his portals with such a brilliant tint, and referred to his door as a guarantee of character. The hovel was a disgrace, and each year a rumour ran that the Duchy proposed to expel Mr. Cawker's family and pull down his dwelling; but the thing did not happen and the tenant made no objection, for none knew better than himself the peculiar secret charms of this abode.

Hither came Ives Pomeroy on a day in late September. His friend had been stricken down with a cold upon the chest, and for the moment Moleskin repined at home and occupied enforced leisure with planning of further enterprises.

Ives had gratified his mother by some active expressions of sorrow at the poacher's physical misfortunes, and when he went further and proposed to visit Moleskin and take him some refreshments, Avisa prepared them.

"I could wish 'twas any other body," she said. "But I trust you not to be led away by the old man. Remember the advantages you have had over the likes of him. You ought to try and do him good, not let him do you harm."

"We understand one another very well," he answered. "We'm both against things in general, and very natural that we should be, seeing what a damned world it is. But you needn't suppose he's got any power over me. I can do pretty well what I like with the man. He's a very sensible chap and a good sort. I wish there was more of the same."

Moleskin expressed delight at seeing the youth, and praised him in no stinted terms for his generosity.

"A regular socialist you be," he said. "And a good working Christian in the bargain. Not a soul from Merivale have been to see me. They old Toops haven't took a bit of notice of my illness—selfish old swine. But I'll pay 'em yet. A beautiful jelly! That masterpiece of a woman, your mother, made it without a doubt. And a bit of neck of mutton, I see! Bless her for it. I won't forget, mind you. Nobody does me a good turn without having a good turn done to them sooner or later."

"I hope your dear mother finds herself doing clever," said Mary, and Ives answered that she was pretty well.

The home of Moleskin was sufficiently dismal. He sat in an old armchair by the peat fire, with a screen behind him. He coughed continually and his windpipe rattled. His wife, whose weak spine caused her to be a confirmed invalid, lay upon a little couch on the other side of the fire, and Mary Cawker sat in the window mending the poacher's socks. A setter dog reposed beside Moleskin, and from the passage way outside came the clucking of fowls that pecked about the threshold and houseplace. They occasionally ascended to the bedrooms also.

"Give Mr. Cawker his physic, Mary," ordered the wife. "Doctor said he was to have it every two hours."

She usually called her husband "Mr. Cawker," though sometimes she hurled a strong word at him instead. Her contempt was never hidden. Her life had been one long physical and mental tribulation; but she regarded the workhouse infirmary as a sort of haven or beacon of hope promised hereafter. Just now the storm and stress of life abated, since the poacher was an invalid; but she knew very well when he recovered that he would make up for lost time. She also fathomed his purpose respecting Ives Pomeroy, and now regarded the youth with mournful eyes; but Moleskin was quite alive to the situation. He had things to say to his friend that it was not desirable his wife or daughter should hear; therefore he rose and bade the visitor follow him.

"Come in my room," he suggested. "I'm just so comfortable sitting up in my bed as I be here. Then us can talk."

"Mother thought the mutton would make some very fine broth for your father," said Ives to Mary; then he followed Moleskin.

The invalid slept on the ground floor in a little chamber behind the kitchen. It had two doors and was rich in secret receptacles. Mr. Cawker now got into bed in his clothes, drew certain grimy blankets up to his neck, and put his hat on also—for warmth, as he said. He coughed and gurgled a good deal, but declared himself to be better.

With considerable cunning he played upon the moods and miseries of the younger man before reaching his own business; then, when Pomeroy was tuned to consider lawlessness, Moleskin broached an undertaking.

"I've thought a lot about you lately, and that shameless girl who throwed you over for Samuel Bolt. Of course 'twas his expectations, and she'll live to mourn the day, for money don't take the place of a man like you. However, there's as many good maidens in the world as there are good wives, and always will be."

"He put his hopes of money before her," said the other. "I don't blame her altogether, for when he talked about thousands of pounds——"

"Certainly I don't blame her either," declared Moleskin. "Like your large-hearted nature to see the truth of it all. We have to blame the world in general, not her. She may come round yet to your way of thinking. Very likely she have already done so and smarts waking and sleeping to think of what she have lost. But 'tis society, not a silly woman, that you've got to quarrel with. For my part, I'm an enemy of it and always have been. Take that Serpell. One of his work-folk knocked his wife on the head and then cut his own throat a bit backalong. There it is in a nutshell! That's the man who be the type of capital—a hard, evil-minded, Godless rogue who grinds the face of the poor. And I'm going to be revenged upon that man! So soon as ever I can get about again, I take it out of him—at any cost. As a socialist 'tis my duty to do it and I'm going to do it—to avenge that poor murderer and suicide."

Ives nodded.

"I don't care how hard he's hit—or any of 'em. I'm ripe for anything now," he said.

"A regular Napoleon you are," declared Mr. Cawker. "You'd very soon help to put the world right, if you could get the rising generation to look at things like you do. Well, to come to facts, I had a squint at the Oaktown birds just afore I was took ill, and a grander lot I never seed—or want to—never. Last year there was hardly any shooting to name; and I happen to know that George Job—you know. He'm good for six brace any day in October; and I can get six brace took in another quarter as well. I shall be up and about by then. I don't know if you feel the same as me; but I'm that full of the Christian love of mankind in general, and of beast and bird, too, for that matter, that I don't care how hard I smite

these here Tories, with their cant and selfishness. However, if you don't like to lend a hand say so. Perhaps you ban't such a right down radical as me yet. But I'm sure you'll come to it, for you've got more brain-power than an old man like me, and must understand the times better."

"I'd rather shoot Serpell than his wretched pheasants," said Ives. "If we was in America, some brave man would let daylight into the blackguard jolly soon."

"A regular hero in your ideas! I'm proud to know a chap who can talk like that! But there's no getting rid of tyrants, same as there was in the good old times. So we'll hit him where 'twill hurt him most—in his pocket. A pheasant be worth two shilling every time—to me, and that's what I shall get. I'll share the money with you, of course, if——"

"Damn the money! I don't want the money."

"Like you to say that. You've got a regular Gospel contempt of cash. 'Tis a very unusual sign of greatness. I feel the same, for that matter; but, with a bedridden wife and a daughter, I must combine business and my duty to the nation. The labourer is worthy of his hire. However, I'll take the money. From your point of view you can either call it doing justice for the sake of the poor, or having a bit of sport—which you please. I never met a man larger-minded than what you are, whichever way you look at it. We've got to live, and we've got to advance our ideas. Take me. Be my dear wife and daughter to go into the workhouse and that man, Serpell, batten on the sweat of the poor and drive frantic creatures to kill themselves? Not while I can have a dash at his pheasants!"

"I'll lend a hand with pleasure," declared Ives.

"Then we'll work together! There's a full moon in middle October, and the leaf is coming down early this year. On the twentieth I hear in private that Serpell

is to have a big battoo shoot. To go in for battoo shooting at all shows the sort of man he is. But it takes nine tailors to make a man, anyway; so we can't blame him there. However, you and me will take our bit of fun afore the battoo. Now I'll let you into a secret 'bout Oaktown as will much amaze you. Me and the new underkeeper from Cornwall be great friends, and he can't abide the head keeper, Gregory—as well I knowed he wouldn't. No man of spirit could."

Moleskin proceeded to elaborate a very simple evening's work. Ives was to act as decoy; Mr. Cawker, as the more experienced hand, proposed to do the shooting. He knew where the pheasants congregated by night, and perfectly understood the methodical procedure of the keepers. All was very easy and straightforward.

When Mary Cawker brought a bowl of broth to her father an hour later, she found him explaining a strange weapon that looked like a heavy, metal walking-stick. She returned to her mother; and while the men planned a deliberate raid on Oaktown, the women mourned for Ives Pomeroy, and Mrs. Cawker bitterly regretted the fact that another hopeful youth was becoming entangled with her disreputable spouse.

"'Twill be that poor young fellow from Mary Tavy over again," she said. "This boy's safe to get catched, and Mr. Cawker will come out clear of it as usual."

"I begged him to keep off father when he gave me the lettuces," said Mary.

"Lord knows what the young generation sees in such a reckless old man," declared Mrs. Cawker. "But whether or no, I've got too high an opinion of the Pomeroys, and especially Mrs. Pomeroy, to let it go on if I can prevent it."

"How can we? What power have we got? Father always catches people just when they'm ripe for mischief. He knows to an hour when they'll do his bidding. He

got hold of Saul Bassett when he'd been turned off from the quarry, and now he's catched this chap, just after that woman he was mad about has married somebody else."

The invalid sighed; then she considered a scheme to upset her husband's hopes.

"You can't tell his mother anything. She'd never believe it, I'm sure. But there's one you might speak to next time you are down there. I mean Emanuel Codd. He's old, and he's worked for the Pomeroys all his life. If you was to tell him that his master and Mr. Cawker are caballing, he might use his wits to prevent it."

"I heard the word 'pheasant,'" said Mary, "and father was showing Mr. Pomeroy his air-gun when I went in."

"Pheasants, of course. 'Tis the pheasant time in a few days. Many an' many a woman finds it hard to forgive A'mighty God for making pheasants, Mary; and I'm one of 'em. When I'm left alone on my back here sometimes, and all's still, and I hear the birds croaking out 'pon the Moor, as they will in May, my heart gets as cold as a lump of ice, and I look on to October, and spring be nought to me."

"Be brave about it," said Mary Cawker. "Can't go on forever. One of two things must happen to father afore many more years pass: he must be catched red-handed, or he must give it up."

"He'll never give it up."

"Then he'll go on till he'm too weak in the hams to escape, and they'll take him."

"A blessed hope," said the sufferer. "For if they catch Mr. Cawker, I must go in the infirmary and end my days in one of they incurable homes, all easy and comfortable."

"Better still that father should reform. Stranger things have happened. He's often thought of it quite serious himself for that matter. Anyway, I'll speak to Emanuel

Codd and ax him to do what he can. I'm hopeful that doctor won't let father out of the house for a fortnight yet, and by that time pheasants will run a bit cheaper, maybe, and be less worth shooting."

"You don't know Mr. Cawker," answered her mother. "If pheasants be cheaper, so many the more will he shoot of 'em—that's his way. He never makes any mistake of that sort."

Then Moleskin got up and returned to the fire, while Ives, expressing a hope that he would soon be perfectly well again, set off home.

"A noble young man—a right down follower of Christ," said the poacher quite seriously, after Pomeroy had left. "All for share and share alike, and uplifting the humble and meek. As good as a sermon, I'm sure."

But Mrs. Cawker cast a withering glance from her couch.

"You bad old devil!" she said. "Drink your broth and shut your mouth. You ought to blush for yourself every time you pass a young chap. 'Christ,' indeed! I wonder you dare to take the Name."

Mary was as good as her word, and made an opportunity to see the head man of Vixen Tor Farm. She supposed him the friend of Ives Pomeroy, and discussed the farmer in absolute ignorance that she spoke with his enemy.

"A son of Belial be your father," said Mr. Codd. "I don't say it out of no ill feeling to you or your poor mother; but Moleskin's right down wicked, and, as to Ives Pomeroy, he's gunpowder for any Devil's match—always have been."

"Warn him then. Tell him what me and mother know only too well: that my father's no friend to him or any young fellow."

"How should such a youth have friends?" asked Codd bitterly. "Look at me—a person of some account, I be-

lieve, and pretty well up in human nature. He flouts me, calls me names, scoffs at my large sense! 'Tis quite enough for me to offer advice, for him to scorn it. If I told him to stick to Moleskin through thick and thin, I dare say he'd never see your father again. But if I warned him that he was doing a dangerous deed, he'd only laugh in my face."

"His mother then."

"That's no good. She don't understand him worth a rap. Too soft with him by far, as I've told her till I'm sick of telling her."

"Well, there it is," said the girl. "We can't do no more. They are going into something together, and my father's pretty well again now, so you may be sure 'twill happen soon. Pheasants 'tis; and that's all I know about it."

"I'll keep it in mind," answered Emanuel; and he did.

Upon reflection he guessed pretty accurately at his enemy's intention, but instead of making any appeal to Ives, the old man went elsewhere. At *The Jolly Huntsmen* various people were gathered together on the following Saturday night, and in the course of general conversation, Pomeroy uttered opinions which brought upon him the harsh condemnation of Matthew Northmore. The farmer, to do him justice, spoke from conviction, not personal bias. But Ives answered angrily, and it required the united efforts of Peter and Joel Toop to silence the disputants.

Immediately afterwards Northmore left the bar and Emanuel Codd followed him. Among the latter's failings was a lack of physical courage, but he had shared the farmer's indignation and taken his part in the argument with Ives. Therefore Matthew heard him now and seriously considered the things that he spoke.

Codd explained that the master of Vixen Tor Farm was in league with a poacher, and this Northmore already

guessed. But when the labourer declared that Ives had actually planned to help Moleskin, then Northmore viewed the facts more gravely. For the time, however, he had fought and conquered his personal hatred of Pomeroy, as now appeared.

"For his mother's sake I'd do anything to save the fool," he said. "A sharp caution is about the most likely thing to steady him. No business of mine, but yet I'll make it so. Leave the rest to me. I'll talk to Inspector Bachelor and get him to warn Pomeroy. The young dolt is only looking at this business from one point of view. If he saw it from another, he might stop his folly."

Then Codd departed, a disappointed man. He had hoped that Northmore would lay a trap for the enemy; but that was not Matthew's intention. His own heart had taught him much since Ruth's refusal. He bore ill-will towards Ives, but the temptation to use this knowledge as a weapon was very slight. First he determined to take no step at all. Then, as became a man, he decided actually to help the younger. He changed his mind thrice before the issue, but finally he endeavoured to do Ives a service and spoke to the local inspector of police concerning him. His good offices came too late; and his words, instead of being a friendly hint to Inspector Bachelor, who was himself a father, that he might try and help a young man out of harm's way, presented the policeman with a valuable clue. For Ives had already fallen.

CHAPTER XII

AVISA TRIES TO SAVE HER SON

Towards the end of October there fell a day of tempest and heavy rain. Each breath of the storm seemed to clear a thousand forest boughs; Walla ran hoarsely through her gorges beneath Vixen; and only nightfall did the weather change, the wind rest a while, and peace return with darkness. Then the moon rose and presently, in many a glade and glen, the wet fallen leaves shone like stars upon the dark earth and made little constellations that glimmered there against the gloom of night.

This was the occasion when Ives Pomeroy set out with Moleskin to shoot pheasants in Oaktown woods. The poacher had hoped to be earlier afield, but his doctor prevented that, and Mr. Cawker, for personal reasons, made no hurry to appear in public.

He had arranged an exceedingly simple plan of action. The younger man visited one important preserve; the older, with his air-gun, sought another. Ives played decoy, and while Moleskin slew, the other poacher fired a fowling-piece merely to attract attention. Thrice, at intervals of five minutes, he woke the echoes and set dogs barking and men running. Secure in his superior speed and physical powers, Pomeroy waited until he actually heard the forces of law and order closing in upon him; then he set off at an easy trot and was soon safe enough. One man, however, had seen him cross a drive in the moonlight. The gamekeeper believed that he recognized young Pomeroy; but he could not be positive. Meantime Mr. Cawker killed twenty pheasants. They roosted in the fir trees and under bright moonlight made an easy target. Ives was first at the appointed tryst, some miles distant, and by three o'clock

in the morning Moleskin, very much fatigued, joined him there. The birds were then handed to a receiver, who had driven out from Plymouth for them with a pony and trap.

Three days afterwards came the sequel. Then the police, working with the Oaktown keepers, prepared to make an arrest. Mr. Cawker did not escape suspicion; but he was known to be ill, and, on the day before the excursion, let it be understood that he must continue to keep the house by doctor's orders. His women were familiar with his movements; but they had long been schooled to hold their peace. The poacher, moreover, took to bed again for a couple of days, as an additional security. By that time Northmore, in all ignorance of the truth, had warned Inspector Bachelor to speak words in season to young Pomeroy; but as this man already suspected Ives on the strength of a keeper's statement, the farmer's warning amounted to confirmation.

Then followed incidents that long made food for argument in the neighbourhood.

Ives did not hide from his mother the thing that he had done, and the confession was made at a very critical moment. For once, to his surprise, Avisa's unfailing patience before his escapades appeared to desert her. She was very angry and cried shame upon him in vigorous terms.

"How have you the heart and the face to sit there and tell me this?" she said. "You—a grown man now—getting near five-and-twenty year old. You laugh—you ought to groan, Ives Pomeroy. If 'twas in my power, I'd flog you for this till my body ached; if 'twas in my power, I'd take you this instant moment to Oaktown and make you beg that man's forgiveness on your knees! Your father's son! A black day's work, and I'd never have thought it of you—I'd never have believed it."

"More fool you," he said roughly. "You ought to know me well enough by now; and, if you don't, 'tis no

fault of mine. My hand is against all slavery and sweating, and I'll strike where I please and who I please. Serpell's a rogue, and fair game for honest men. Let him dare lay a finger on me and I'll tell the truth about him afore the public—damned knave that he is."

"Do two wrongs make a right?" she asked. "If he's a thief and a dishonest man—which be only wild trash, for he's neither—but if he was, is that a reason why you should sink to roguery and take what don't belong to you? Would you filch his purse? Would you go in his shop to Plymouth and steal his goods? You—a son of Ives Pomeroy?"

"Of course you argue like a woman," he said. "Can't you see the difference between such things? Can't you see I'm all against property and want the land for the poor? Who be this chap to stick up walls and say 'you shan't come here,' or 'you shan't come there'? Damn him and his Tory robbery! The earth belongs to us all; and pheasants be just natural things, like any other birds, or the fish in the river. And, whether or no, I'll go my way—and——"

"Be quiet and hear me," said Avisa. "That any son of mine should be wild and silly, and venturesome and rash, was natural. But no son of mine, and my husband, has the right to be a fool. You're talking wicked folly, and you know it. What did you say to the fox that stole two ducks last winter? And him only a hungry beast with the usual four-footed manners. And what will the world say to you for stealing a man's game—you—supposed to be properly taught and a Christian?"

"The world will say nothing at all, because the world will know nothing at all," he answered. "I've told nobody but you, and none else will ever hear about it. I wish to God you was larger-minded. Time was when you'd have laughed at this—same as you laughed at pranks I've played before."

"'Pranks'—yes. You've never gone poaching before—you've never taken what didn't belong to you before; or if you have, you've never had the impudence to tell me about it."

"All right, then; I'll not trouble you with my affairs again. I might have known a woman like you would have misunderstood; but I gave you credit for more sense than you've got, seemingly."

"You gave me credit for less honesty than I've got, and less love for you than I've got. Be your mind so crooked that you couldn't see what this must mean to me? Be you mad, Ives?"

"I hope I am, if the rest of the down-trodden fools round here be sane. I despise the world and I despise you for siding with the rich against the poor. But you needn't trouble about me no more. I know a woman or two yet what don't think I'm mad. Fearless chaps like me, who see that things are all wrong and ban't afraid to fight against 'em, be always mad, no doubt."

"May God A'mighty help you to see clearer," she said very earnestly. "May He lighten your blindness, Ives; for blind you are."

"Think so if you like; I know better, and I dare say you'll live to see it. I'll go my way and hate injustice and fight it with my last breath, wherever it lands me. You can mark that."

"Life has got to teach you your lesson."

"Life won't teach me that labour be treated properly by capital; life won't teach me the strong want to help the weak."

They were interrupted by Lizzie Pomeroy. She was not frightened, but infinitely surprised and in great haste.

"Why, here's Mr. Bachelor and two other policemen coming up through the field!" she said. "Whatever be they wanting here, mother?"

Avisa looked at her son and a world of sudden grief appeared upon her face.

"Ives! Ives!" she said.

"I know! It's all right; they've smelt a rat! You can guess where I shall be. Let me have some food when the coast's clear and then I'll be away till the storm's blown over. Find out if Moleskin's took and let me know up on the Vixen after dark."

He was gone from a back entrance long before the policemen had reached the farm. Indeed, from his secret den, high up in the fastness of the Vixen, Pomeroy watched the officers arrive beneath. His heart beat hard with excitement at this event. He knew not how they had connected him with the raid, and began to wonder much what had happened to Moleskin. He determined to stop hidden until night, and then visit his accomplice. A dozen plans for future action also filled his mind as he watched his mother address an inspector. On the whole he rejoiced and felt a hero—for this event must surely lift him above the tame young men of the countryside.

Before the police arrived Avisa had spoken to Lizzie and told her the truth.

"The darkest day that's ever fallen for us, my pretty," she said quietly. "Dear Ives have done wrong, Lizzie. His own folly and another's wickedness be to blame, I reckon. He've been shooting game birds: that's what he's wanted for."

"Ives—Ives wanted? Oh, mother!"

The girl turned white. Terror now came into her face. She spoke quickly to Avisa and held tightly to her hand, like a little frightened child.

"Oh, mother, save him, save him!" she said.

The men came up the garden path and their voices sounded loud in the silence. Avisa Pomeroy did not hear her girl. She was looking up at the sky over the Moor. Her mind worked swiftly and her lips moved. "Lord

have mercy on my son! Lord have mercy on my son," she whispered to herself again and again.

Then she felt her daughter's hand and heard Lizzie cry once more.

"Save him, mother, save him!"

It seemed now that Avisa came to herself.

"Bear yourself braver, Lizzie. Yes—yes; I'll save him, please God."

She turned to the men.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bachelor."

"Good-morning, ma'am. I'm sorry for our errand and I hope with all my heart that your son will be able to clear himself; but 'tis rather bad against him. Anyway, he must come with us, please. 'Tis feared that he had a hand in that business to Oaktown."

"Yes, he had," she answered quietly. "You will find him hidden up in the rocks there. I'll show you where he is."

The policeman stared.

"'Tis a terrible thing for you—a terrible thing. I wish to God, ma'am, you'd not been called to do this," he said earnestly.

Her sad eyes met his.

"So do I," she answered. "Love's a cruel hard task-master sometimes."

She led them to the Vixen, while Lizzie hastened to her grandmother with the tidings of what had happened.

"Given him up! Given Ives up!" cried the ancient. "Given up my son's son to the constables! Lord deliver us, Lizzie. Is it the end of the world?"

Avisa took the men to the foot of Vixen Tor, and Ives, hidden from view, watched his secret divulged and his escape defeated.

"Ives Pomeroy!" shouted Mr. Bachelor. "I've got to arrest you in the name of the law for shooting pheasants to Oaktown on the night of the twenty-fifth of October.

For the present you'd better to say nought. Us have got a trap down below and you'll be took to Tavistock and brought afore the Justices come Wednesday next. So come down, if you please."

The man aloft boiled with passion against his mother. Her back was turned now and she walked slowly to her house. His rage did not prevent him from seeing the futility of resistance.

"Don't add to the trouble by fighting," urged Mr. Bachelor. "It won't help in the long run. I've got you now, and 'tis only adding to the offence to resist me."

Pomeroy perceived the truth of these remarks. He showed himself, ignored the police and shouted to his mother:

"God damn you for evermore for this, you traitor to your own son! And mark me: never again, so long as I live, will I bring my head under your roof, or call you 'mother' more. If I go to hell, 'tis you've driven me there—remember that, you heartless devil!"

She heard and went her way without turning.

Then Pomeroy descended and soon found himself driving to Tavistock. He preserved absolute silence, and no man heard his voice again that day.

Avisa was entering her home when her husband's mother met her in the door.

"What have you done, woman?" she asked. "D'you mind that this man was the child of Ives Pomeroy? Could the son of my son, for all his wicked tricks, have earned clink?[1] 'Tis not to be thought of, and you've worked evil in this house, and marred your boy's life forever—forever, I tell you!"

"Ives will never darken our doors again," sobbed Lizzie.

Then Avisa spoke. She took out her handkerchief and wiped Lizzie's eyes with it. Her own were dry.

"Darken our doors he can't, my pretty. Better than sunshine always. I doubt you'm both wrong. My son

[1] Clink: Prison.

will come home to me a wiser man—some day—yes, he'll come home, if I know him true."

She left them then, departed to her own chamber and remained invisible until the time of the midday meal. Then she returned, placid and calm, with her heart hidden. But Lizzie was prostrated and old Jane Pomeroy wept without ceasing.

CHAPTER XIII

OPINIONS

It happened that most of the few persons who felt interest concerning Ives Pomeroy were collected at *The Jolly Huntsmen* on the night following his arrest, and the incident formed material for a somewhat lively debate.

Emanuel Codd, as being most familiar with the facts, was listened to very attentively, and when he explained what had really happened, a murmur of wonder broke from those who heard. There were present the brothers Toop, Ruth Rendle, Samuel Bolt, and Nicholas Warren, one of the policemen who had taken Pomeroy; others joined the company afterwards.

"'Tis a terrible far-reaching thing," said Peter. "Because though a fortnight or so, which is what he will get, ban't nothing out of the man's life in itself, the event goes into his future history, and is a black mark against him for evermore."

"If she'd let him hide, he'd have got off, no doubt, and gone for a sailor perhaps, or some such thing," explained Warren. "I've known like cases. Then, when he came back in a year or so, the matter would have blown over an' there'd have been no arrest."

"She thought different, however," said Joel Toop. He had been gloomy of late since Ruth refused him; but this stroke of misfortune for another cheered him indirectly.

"Never heard the like," declared Samuel Bolt. "For a parent to do such a thing—'tis very wonderful in my judgment—eh, miss?"

He spoke to Ruth, and she answered with some emotion.

"I can't understand. I can't believe that it is as they say. Mrs. Pomeroy of all women."

"'Tis true enough," answered the policeman. "I was there when my gentleman come down from his perch and cussed her. Awful language; and she took it so calm as a sheep takes killing."

"It would have killed some women," said Ruth Rendle.

"A creature forged of strong steel," declared Codd. "Be it as it will, he've got what he deserved and no more."

They discussed the gravity of Pomeroy's sin, and were divided about it. The pheasants had not been traced and the evidence was circumstantial until Mrs. Pomeroy actually declared her son guilty.

Now Matthew Northmore entered. He had promised a book to Ruth some time before she refused him, and to-night he brought it. But he came at a moment somewhat inopportune, for his name was on Codd's lips at the time.

"How did they trace it to the chap? That's what I don't know," said Joel Toop.

Nicholas Warren was unable to enlighten him.

"You must ask inspector," he answered. "I can't say how he come by the clue, though certainly a gamekeeper thought he seed Pomeroy on the night."

"More than that went to it," said Mr. Codd. "I may take some credit, I believe. A little bird whispered to me what was doing, and I did my duty and mentioned it to an influential man among us. Not to mince words, 'twas Mr. Northmore that I told. He'm a sportsman and a gentleman, and holds such evil doings in scorn."

"Why, you'm a stranger!" cried Peter, from behind the bar; for at this moment Matthew entered.

He nodded and then spoke to Ruth.

"I've brought the book, Miss Rendle—the one I promised."

Her manner was constrained as she thanked him, but

he set it down to the painful past, rather than the present. Then Joel Toop asked the farmer a question and he began to understand.

"'Twas you, then, that helped the police to take young Pomeroy—so Codd here says?"

Northmore did not answer, but looked at Emanuel.

"In a manner of speaking you did," explained the head man at Vixen Tor. "I told you what was in the wind, and you answered back that you'd do something."

"That's right; I did so," admitted Northmore. "But don't let there be any misunderstanding about my part. I had no wish to work the man any harm. 'Twas the other way about. I'd hoped to get him cautioned in time. Unfortunately the trouble was brewed already, and when I spoke to Bachelor, it only served to confirm his suspicions. But I suppose nobody doubts my motives?"

He looked at Ruth as he spoke. She was wiping glasses and paid him no attention.

"'Tis a parlous business for the family," declared Peter. "I never heard that a mother found herself equal to such a hard thing afore."

"She was wrong for my part," answered the policeman, and Samuel Bolt confessed that he blamed Mrs. Pomeroy also.

"She ought to have looked on ahead; but no woman ever does," murmured Joel.

"'Twas too terrible a thing and will set the house against itself forever," foretold Samuel Bolt.

Northmore, however, took the other side.

"I don't agree with you," he said. "'Twas a brave and seemly thing for her to do, and——"

To the astonishment of the company Ruth interrupted him. Anger lighted her face. Her voice shook with it. For the first time in the experience of any present she revealed a fierce temper; and it was Matthew Northmore who suffered the storm.

"You say that! You, that went behind the man's back

and pretended to be his friend, and stabbed him! 'A brave thing!' About as brave as what you did yourself, I should think! What had he ever done to you that you should treat him so? What had he ever done to his mother that she should cast him out like that? 'Twas no true mother did that afore God! And you're no true man to have done this at the bidding of that envious wretch there." She pointed at Emanuel Codd, who answered with a laugh.

"So missy's got a tongue and a temper after all! And seemingly we've found 'em both."

His mind gloated over new possibilities. He continued to cackle in the silence that followed Ruth's speech; then Northmore spoke.

"I'm bitterly sorry to think you don't take my word, Miss Rendle—bitterly sorry. I hope you'll live to see differently. You can ask the inspector what time I first mentioned Pomeroy to him, if you like. 'Twas too late. But Bachelor kept his counsel, and I did not know what I had done."

Then Peter, to gain private ends, took his kinswoman's part.

"The question is what you wanted to interfere for at all, if I may say so," he remarked firmly. "I hate the old to be against the young. 'Twas no more than a bit of silly, high spirits in the man, and I do think that he's punished a deal too hard. Clink's clink, and it sticks terrible close to a chap after. It takes a very strong sort of nature to lift up above such a blow; and Ives Pomeroy, being what he is, will go down as sure as there's a screw loose in him. His mother's done for him in my opinion."

"She knows best," said Northmore. "If Miss Rendle——"

He broke off blankly, for Ruth, at the mention of her name, left the bar and did not return to it.

"You've made her properly cross," said Peter. "And

I don't blame her. A great stickler for justice she be, and with all the sense of a man. There's no doubt most people will agree with her that you're much to blame, Matthew."

"'Tis poor Mrs. Pomeroy is to blame in my humble opinion, not Mr. Northmore," said Samuel Bolt. "How did he know what would fall out? But she did."

"Mrs. Pomeroy's a woman," replied Peter, "and the wisest woman among us may lose her head at a pinch and take a wrong turn—especially a mother. That she've done, if my judgment counts for anything. She ought to have held her tongue and let the police go, and pleaded with the rash fellow afterwards."

"She did right—dead right," answered Northmore; and with this sentiment he left the bar.

"My word! You gived him a flea in his ear, Peter," said Joel. "And I'm not sorry, for he'll keep away now. Not a drink ordered again, you see. Nought but his silly books for Ruth. But she've made her mind pretty clear to-night, too—thank God. She's done with him, anyhow."

"I hope he'll take it so. Her eyes flashed scorn against him—very surprising."

"Who'd have thought the young woman had got such a temper hidden away?" asked Mr. Bolt.

"They all have," answered Codd. "Trust me, there's not one of 'em can't show their claws, given the thing to gally 'em. A proper tantrum; and what do it mean? Trust me to know!"

"Trust you to put a wrong meaning on it," said the policeman, who did not like Mr. Codd. "If us of the force was to follow out all the things you say, there'd not be a man this side of Princetown as wasn't in trouble—except yourself."

"If I can see further through a millstone than you, Nicholas, 'tis your misfortune in your line of life," said

Emanuel sharply. "Too mild and trusting a man for the police, you be, as I've always said."

Joel now looked at the matter from another point of view and indulged in a generalization.

"A fool and not more nor less—that Pomeroy," he declared. "We must suffer fools gladly, as the Bible tells us; but 'tis a great trouble to a community to have 'em in it, and a great drag on credit and progress in general."

"That's what the fools be here for," answered his brother. "If 'twasn't for them, us clever people would be too clever, and the world might go on too fast. They be meant to check progress."

"Ah," said Mr. Joel. "And mighty well they do their work."

"For my part," declared Codd, "speaking as a man not ignorant of stock-rearing in general, I do hold out to the death that they oughtn't to be allowed to breed."

Samuel Bolt stared.

"My imers! What a thought!" he gasped. "You never larned that to church, nor yet to school neither, Emanuel."

"It come from my work along with shorthorns," confessed Mr. Codd. "And I believe, if put in practice, 'twould answer to a miracle."

"It won't do by any means," said Joel Toop; "and it shows how to right one wrong you'd do a worse. 'Tis a very common fault with radicals."

"Prove it then."

"Easy enough. Suppose as only the wise men was allowed to have families—just consider of it; what would happen. How many wise men are there to begin with?"

"Damn few—that's granted," answered Nicholas Warren.

"And always have been few, and always will be. Therefore, if the other sort didn't get a show, the human world would dwindle to nought afore you could look round.

Wise men may be the salt of the earth, but fools are the staple of it. In fact they be the bulk of every nation. 'Tis the plan of God. If us was all wise and all good, His almighty task be ended and the Devil's job likewise. 'Twould be the same as if they was all Conservatives in the House of Parliament. What would happen? Nothing. In fact, the human mind can't picture such a situation."

"Contrary to nature, no doubt," admitted Samuel Bolt. "Of course what's contrary to nature can't be, can it, Mr. Toop?"

"It cannot, Sam. And, therefore," summed up Joel, "we must have fools, and we must have chaps like Pomeroy, and chaps like Northmore, and women with queer opinions, like the mother of the prisoner—and others I know; and even right down rogues and vagabonds—such as this here man!"

Thus did Joel greet Moleskin, who entered the bar while he concluded his philosophical reflections.

"That's a nice way to greet a chap just off his bed of sickness," said the poacher. "However, you always had a funny idea of a joke. You didn't ought to make jokes, Joel. They don't suit your tone of voice, my old dear. But what's this they tell me of young Mr. Pomeroy? I hope 'tis only a silly story, Nicholas Warren?"

"True enough," said the policeman. "I helped to take him."

Moleskin heard every particular of the narrative and expressed himself as much amazed.

"At the very beginning of the man's career—to go and let him be nabbed like that! 'Twill spoil his nerve for years very like, and make him take a hatred of policemen. And I dare swear the poor fellow's innocent as an unborn baby."

"You'm a deep scoundrel," answered Codd fiercely. "Standing there afore honest men and pretending as you

know nought. You'm a disgrace to the police, that's what you are—like a thing they can't cure be a disgrace to the doctors."

Mr. Cawker ordered his liquor and laughed uproariously.

"Can't cure me and can't catch me, eh, my old blid? Catch me first and cure me afterwards, as the haddock said. And why can't they catch me? Because I never do nothing to merit it. All you righteous church-goers know very well that wickedness be punished. Of course 'tis. Then why ban't I, if I'm what you think I be? But the truth is that I'm an upright, straight chap as no man have ever seen do anything outside law and order. 'Tis you and Joel here as be the wicked ones to say such things against me. It strains my charity now and again to keep friends with such people."

He winked at the policeman, and Codd answered:

"You led the man away, and the sin's on your shoulders and the money's in your pocket."

"In that case," answered Mr. Cawker, "the police have certainly collared the wrong man, as their manner is. If I shot the birds and took the money, what have they arrested poor Ives for? Let 'em tell us that. Anyway, as I was in bed all the time by doctor's orders, with deep mischief in the breathing parts, I don't quite see how I could be down to Oaktown shooting pheasants. But of course such a wicked devil as me can be in two places at once."

"We'll take you yet," answered Warren. "And I hope I may be the man to do it, Moleskin."

"For your own credit I'm sure I hope you may be. 'Twould be a great feather in your cap, Nicholas; though to be frank, I'm not hopeful for you. But neither you nor another will ever take me. I'm an honest man—as honest as my father before me."

"Just about the same, I should reckon. We know what happened to him," said Emanuel Codd.

Presently the conversation returned to Mrs. Pomeroy and the thing that she had done.

"Only one of us supports her, and him a teetotaler—Matthew Northmore, in fact," said Joel.

"A man inclined to be very uncharitable," declared Mr. Cawker. "Means well, I dare say, but terrible narrow-minded and quick to think evil."

"Miss Ruth dressed him down pretty sharp, however," answered Samuel Bolt. "My word! Her speech hummed about his ear like an angry appledrane." [1]

"She gave him hell, to say it in a word," declared Warren.

"Quite right, too," answered the poacher. "He deserved it. He hates Ives Pomeroy, and he hates me. Out of sheer friendship I offered to trap a few score rabbits for the man a bit ago; but he'd none of me. That's how I'm treated. And yet there's not a spark more evil in me than in Sammy Bolt here. Good plain-dealers, both of us, and simple-hearted as honest men should be; just the sort of innocent fellows as would go fox-hunting with a pack of sheep! Ban't we, Sammy?"

But Mr. Bolt grew rather hot and indignant.

"I won't be classed with you, Cawker," he said. "Not for a moment will I suffer it. You've got a very bad record, despite all your jokes and silly nonsense. You've done many things you can't look back upon with pleasure and I'm much afraid you're not such an upright character as you say. No, it ban't fair to me to mention us in the same breath—it really ban't fair."

"More it is," answered the poacher. "I quite grant that—such a good boy as you! Run along home, Sammy, to your fine red wife; or, if she don't want you, go to mother!"

Poor Samuel departed in the sound of laughter, and Emanuel Codd accompanied him. The night air cooled

[1] Appledrane: A wasp.

the younger man's anger and he returned to the great subject of the moment.

"What does Mr. Brown say?" asked Bolt presently. "Have he comforted them yet?"

"He was there when I left," answered Codd. "Can't say Arthur Brown comforted 'em much. He wants comfort himself more like. This job have shook him a bit—such a terrible proper person as him."

"'Twas his business to cheer up poor Lizzie, surely?"

"Don't know what he thought about that. All he said to me was that it might be a very serious thing for a young man's future to marry into a family like the Pomeroys. So proper he be! But I dare say I shall catch even him out in something some day, for I've never met the man yet you couldn't trap doing a dirty trick soon or late. You've only got to be patient and watchful; and the weakness of human nature will do the rest."

"He ought to have comforted her, I'm sure, and never spared a thought to himself at such a tragical time," declared Samuel.

BOOK II

CHAPTER XIV

THE FACES OF THE ROCKS

From the granite fastness of the Vixen, where its battlements and towers ascend above Walla, peer forth many faces of men and beasts, and monsters that are neither one nor other. The giant rises brokenly to its double crown. Certain low slabs about the foundations are succeeded by blocks that now appear to have been piled of set purpose, but in truth are weathered out from the primal mass. Then rise escarpments around the main bulk of the tor. The Vixen stands above a hundred feet high, with precipices round about and ledges and crags on every side. To the west these grow less formidable, for time has dealt roughly with them; immense boulders, as large as haystacks, have been torn from aloft, and the colossus is robbed of half its members. These piles of stone now lie round about deep buried in the turf, and tell of ages when the body from which they fell was mightier far than now, and when its components lent to the whole a contour widely different from that at present lifted before men's eyes. Through the dim shades of pre-historic time conscious intelligence beheld these rocks in the desert, and perchance traced upon their brow and verge the likeness of living things it knew; but the very stars have wheeled into different patterns since those primal people passed, and Vixen scowls or smiles with other faces than they saw.

To-day, viewed from the north this mass resembles a weary giant sitting with his back against a stone greater

than himself. His immense head is bent forward and the lines of neck and shoulders suggest a being forlorn and unhappy. Seen from Walla's eastern bank across the valley, the tor presents a countenance snake-like and sinister. This presentment brings to the mind a gargoyle, half ape, half fiend, that broods over Paris from the heights of Notre Dame. From beneath a flat diadem the creature's sloping brow protrudes, runs into a pointed nose, and ends in a full deep muzzle that bulges, like a tiger's. Upon mighty shoulders this evil pate is perched, and before the idol, like a company of worshippers at some demon shrine, extend squat thorn trees in a scattered row along the breast of the hill. Viewed from elsewhere the tor takes shape of a sphinx, or shows the wide-eyed Ethiop, Memnon—slayer of lions and lover of women. Him Achilles slew; but here his immense image still stares east and broods over the rising of the god he worshipped; here fair Æos still sheds mother tears that glitter upon her son's feet in the grey twilights of the morning.

Avisa Pomeroy, upon her way to Merivale, turned a little out of the road that she might look upon the Vixen from a certain point of the western hill beyond it. Beside her walked Rupert Johnson, the second hand of the farm, and he explained the thing that he meant to show his mistress.

"The very daps of Mister Ives, I do assure 'e. 'Tis a bit of stone aloft 'pon the brink of the upper rocks, and if you catch it towards sundown as it is now, you can't fail to mark the likeness. I stared when I seed it, and my first thought was that you'd be pleased. There's a bit of grass and briar tangles over the brow of un, for all the world the same as his hair to tangle upon his forehead."

"I shall like much to see it, Rupert," said Avisa. "And I'm sure I hope it won't be long afore we all see my son himself."

"I hope it won't, ma'am. Farm's awful desolate without him, and his dog be cruel wisht and off her food. There's only two more days of the fortnight to go and then——"

Mrs. Pomeroy did not speak, and they walked on to a spot not far removed from an ancient cross known as the "Windystone" which stands beside a rivulet upon that heath.

"Now please to look, ma'am. The sunlight be just touching the chin of him!"

Johnson pointed to the edge of the Vixen, and Mrs. Pomeroy was interested to see something that by stretch of the imagination might be likened to a profile of Ives.

"Very clever indeed of you to mark it. How surprised he'll be. You must show it to him, but like enough he'll not see it himself, for no man knows his own fashion of face, but overrates or scorns it too much according to his nature. Right there was where he made his den, I'm thinking."

"I doubt he'll never go up there again, ma'am."

"Well, he might be in better places. 'Tis time he put away childish things, Rupert; and soon he will."

The labourer left her then, and, having again regarded nature's sketch in stone and come to the conclusion that it was really quite unlike her boy, Avisa turned to the road and presently descended into Merivale.

She stopped where Rachel Bolt's cottage stood beside the way over against Samuel's. Rachel, according to her custom, sat beside a front window, and when she saw the visitor, she rose and welcomed her.

"Haven't seed 'e this longful time, my dear, and very glad I be to do it. Come in, come in. Us'll have a cup of tea. Thank the Lord you ban't one of they 'dash in, dash out' sort. When you do come, you come at leisure and bide a reasonable time with a neighbour."

As usual the older woman was absorbed with her own

affairs. Partly from delicacy, chiefly from choice, she made no mention of Ives, but dwelt on her own son and his wife.

"All goes well with them, I'm bound to say," she began while they ate and drank. "'Twas certain that such a son should get a good wife. Yes—taking it all round—a good wife, Avisa; but that's not to say she's quite all I'd hoped and expected as a daughter-in-law."

"No mother's ever satisfied in that quarter."

"Naturally; and with a man like my Samuel—however, I've got him still, and, after all, nothing else don't matter much. 'Tis curious that the girl should be clever in some ways and chuckle-headed in others. But so it is. That fainty weather with thunder in the air as we had a bit ago, acted very strangely upon her. She'd none of me, but just went off three days running—once to her father and twice up on the Moor all alone. A lack of sense and patience; still a good wife to Samuel, for I've got his own word, and he couldn't tell a falsehood for all the tin in Cornwall."

"That's all right then."

"The child will be a great arrival. No time lost. But Sam's set up his winter cough again, I'm sorry for to say. I'd hoped us would hear no more of that. However, when I mentioned it she showed a bit of temper."

"You must be reasonable, Rachel, my dear. The girl can't help Samuel's cough."

"I don't say she can; yet she ought to be sorry about it, not cross with me for moaning over it a bit. What mother wouldn't? And knowing, too, that his father went off in a decline without rhyme or reason in his forties."

"Do she cook pretty well for him?"

"To be honest with you, Avisa, she don't. I take my dinner along with them Sundays—always. 'Twas Sam's wish—not hers, I believe. But you can't be sure from week to week how the meat will be. Sometimes 'tis all

anybody could wish—tender all through and nicely browned atop with the juice pouring out at every cut, and the gravy and vegetables everything they should be; and sometimes 'tis quite the other way and beyond my poor teeth altogether. Yorkshire pudding she can't cook, and I've offered to show her how every Sunday since they was married; but she've never let me do it."

"She'll larn in time, be sure. Busy sewing, no doubt."

"Not she! When I remind her, as I do pretty near every day, 'tis always the same answer. 'Plenty of time, plenty of time.' I'm doing what I can on the quiet only known to Samuel. She'll be thankful when the hour comes, but she'd be angry if she knowed it now. Ban't a soft woman, you understand, Avisa. Hard as a flint, in fact, where you'd least expect it."

"I shouldn't have thought that."

"True, I assure 'e. Their cat chetted[1] last week, and if she didn't drown every one of 'em with her own hand under the yowling mother's very nose! 'How could you go for to do it?' I axed her. 'Because your son wouldn't,' she said. 'Some sane person had to; us don't want six cats.'"

Mrs. Pomeroy laughed.

"I suppose that was true, Rachel."

"Of course, but 'twas the way she said it. 'Good Lord, Jill,' I answered her. 'Your voice do make my flesh cream down my spine. 'Tis a voice that may be the voice of a woman who'd so soon drown a baby as a kitten!' Then she lost her temper, I'm sorry to say, and I left her."

Avisa's heart went out to Jill. She had never cared about the girl, but the recital of these events softened her dislike to sincere pity.

"So untidy, too," said Mrs. Bolt. "You know what a man Samuel is—the pink of neatness in his person and everything. Washes to the waist every day of his life, and a hot bath on Saturday night. But she makes trouble

[1] Chetted: Kittened.

even about that—some nonsense about the fire being let out and wanting to go to bed early, or something. But I don't interfere—don't think that, Avisa. I know a mother's place, thank God. Just a word in season to Samuel behind the scenes, but nothing more than that. He comes in and smokes his pipe of an evening now and again, for she's terrible fond of going to bed early. Not very civil to the man who works for her all day long; but so it is. And when she's washed up, she'll often leave him so as he can't hear his own voice or play her a tune on his flute; so naturally he comes across the road, where his voice and his flute be blessed music and always welcome."

Avisa nodded and her friend read some admonishment into the gesture.

"Don't you think I don't like her, or any such thing, you know. We've all got our faults and failings, and many of them are cured as time goes on, though certainly many get worse, too. However, I'm very hopeful that she'll increase in sense—as she must do with such a sensible man always at her elbow—who could help it? I don't force my sense on her, Avisa—far from that. I merely look on and hold off. But lookers-on see most of the game, of course."

"That's just it," answered the other. "People don't like other eyes over their cards when they'm playing the game of life. If there's one thing more maddening than to be showed where you've played wrong by somebody out of the game, it is to know you've played wrong and to know that somebody else knows it, too, but won't say a word."

"I'll say nought—not to her. I never will come between husband and wife that way. My son's love and worship be everything in the world that's left to live for, and if I shook him off me by saying a word against Jill, I should die."

The other was silent for some time; then she spoke.

"If you've drunk your tea we'll go over and see the girl. I'd like to do it. Haven't seen her to have a tell with since she married."

"Sorry I can't," confessed Mrs. Bolt. "I was in there this morning and we didn't have words—God grant we never shall have—but I ventured to say some little thing about the pastry to dinner last Sunday, and I mentioned a baking powder I always used, owing to Samuel's digestion being not all one could wish; and she misunderstood and thought I was advising, and spoke rather short and said unkind things about Sam's inward parts. A mother couldn't stand that, Avisa. So I just up and left her. And I've made up my mind not to call in again till to-morrow—just to mark I was hurt."

"Then I'll go alone," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Be very careful," urged her friend. "She's like a cat on hot bricks sometimes. Don't you advise nothing, whatever you may see that calls for altering. And you'll see a lot. But be blind to it, my dear, for Samuel's sake."

Avisa promised to exercise all possible caution, and presently went across the road, while Rachel watched nervously from her window.

"God send she'll be careful and pick her words!" the old woman muttered to herself.

Jill was sulky at first, for she had seen Mrs. Pomeroy come from her mother-in-law's door. She put a chair and prepared to act on the defensive, but Avisa mentioned neither Mrs. Bolt nor Samuel; she concerned herself only with the woman, and was very glad to hear that Jill found herself well and hearty. The girl belied Rachel, for she was at work with her needle.

They spoke of the great business of maternity; then, since Avisa made no mention of the old woman over the way, Jill perversely prepared to do so. She stopped, however, and her thoughts chose another theme.

"I want to say, if you'll let me, that I've thought a

terrible lot about you, Mrs. Pomeroy. 'Twas a very great sorrow to me—Ives. Because we were very good friends once, you know, and he's a dear chap really, though very young and reckless here and there. No sensible person will take much account of this, I reckon—anyway me and Samuel don't. I say such a lesson may be the making of Ives, and I hope it will be."

The mother's face brightened gently.

"Thank you, Jill," she answered. "Few have got the courage to name him to me; and that's because few but think I did wrong to give him up. I know you liked him. Did you mark what he said in court? I did. He aired his opinions, and luckily one of the justices was a liberal-minded man with sense and patience. 'Twas all in the newspaper. The gentleman argued with Ives, and afterwards Ives thanked him in open court, and said he hadn't looked at capital and labour like that, and owned up he'd done wrong! Oh, Jill! That's me in him! 'Tis the dawning of a difference! I never feared to own I'd been wicked, if 'twas proved to me I had been. That power comed earlier with me, because a woman gets wisdom quicker than a man, though she can't hold so much in the long run. But now he's owned he was wrong. 'Tis a very great, hopeful sign. And thank you kindly for naming his name to me. 'Tis a word my ear be very hungry to hear, but few speak it now—out of mistaken kindness."

Jill was rather nervous and yet gratified at this avowal.

"Please the Lord he'll soon be backalong!" she said. "He's a very fine chap and only wants the sense that life will bring him. Fire ban't all a bad thing, as I know who have it, and too much of it. Wish my man felt a bit more of it. Good as gold, and meek as Moses, and patient as a donkey. 'Tis like nought but bread and milk at all your meals. Sometimes I wish to God he'd swear or slap my face, or do something to shake me up; but he's got no devil in him to do it."

"He'll wear well, however."

"His uncle won't die, neither," said Jill drearily. "I tell you these things because you're an understanding woman and don't turn up the whites of your eyes like the fools here, if you be natural afore them and speak your mind. I married the man because I thought he'd get me out of poverty and make my life worth living. But his uncle's well enough to go up to London and see a better doctor. And then, as if that wasn't enough, there's that old creature t'other side the road. I'd sooner have a thousand thorns in my flesh or sleep on nettles, than be alongside her—always there—always there—tearing at my nerves!"

"I understand just how 'tis, Jill."

The girl's eyes glowed and she showed her teeth. The gathered wrongs of many days burst out of her heart.

"Cruel, hateful, blundering old idiot! No common-sense, not a shred! To see her here—even a man would pity me—any man but my man. She must be touching! Can't let even a blasted chair bide where I put it. Now she's watering the plants in the window; now she's up messing over Samuel's clothes; now I see her out of the corner of my eye looking at my darning, till often and often 'tis in me to scream at her and tell her for Christ's sake to get home. Then the questions she asks—sly questions she thinks I won't understand; but they all mean Samuel, and his food, and his drink, and all the rest of it. Good God A'mighty! can I help the man coughing?"

"Can't Samuel do anything? Don't he see how 'tis?"

"Not him. He likes her better'n me. He goes sneaking in to her many a night when he ought to spend his evening here. If she—but what's the use of going on about it? Us must take the rough with the smooth and lie on the bed we've made ourselves. She can't live much longer, I should hope—up home seventy-five. If you only knew—why, last week I actually picked up a stone to fling at her where she sat at her front window with her

old head bobbing over that red geranium and her eyes in here! Of course I didn't fling it; but it shows how raw I be that the idea could even come into my mind."

"I'll see what I can do, Jill."

"No, no, Mrs. Pomeroy. You've got your own business. 'Tis all right. Let things go. It have done me good to let off a bit of steam. I can stand it now; but I'm looking on ahead when the cheel comes. A mother's a very different thing to a childless creature, and I won't answer for what I may do if she begins over the babby. I'm the eldest of eight myself, and I've done everything that can be done for 'em except bear 'em. So let her keep off that, or else. . . . She's a silly old gawkim not to see my good points, though I say it."

"Leave her," said Avisa. "I'll not forget this talk. Allow for her age, Jill. Don't let her fret you more than you can help. And remember you be younger and stronger in the head than her. May I see the house afore I go? If it ban't vitty, I'll come again."

"See it and welcome."

Mrs. Pomeroy praised a little and commended Jill's taste and skill in certain particulars. She stopped until Samuel came home, and presently left the young couple in a most amiable frame of mind with themselves and their treasures.

"A very nice woman," said the man. "I wish, poor soul, she hadn't such a lot of trouble with her son."

"She is a nice woman," answered Jill, "and I'll tell you for why: she makes you respect yourself, and 'tis a peaceful feeling. I wish I felt so oftener. As for that man, trust him to his mother."

Samuel nodded.

"I hope she'm strong enough to do it," he said doubtfully. "But I wish she was a thought more like my dear parent—more heart to her—eh, Jill?"

CHAPTER XV

THE WEATHER-GLEAM

Lizzie and her mother prepared for Ives on the day that his sentence was completed. Avisa busied herself with many things; the girl saw chiefly to her brother's room, made it tidy, set his few books in order, and put a bunch of little chrysanthemums on the table. As evening came the excitement grew, and even old Mrs. Pomeroy could not sit still in her chair. Thrice she secretly slipped out to the garden to see whether her grandson was coming home through the twilight; then her daughter found her and called her in.

"He won't be here yet," she said. "I lay he'll come in on the quiet, his usual way long after we be all to bed."

"More like he won't come at all," answered Jane, sorry to be caught. "Don't you think I'm looking for him, Avisa. He's gone for a soldier in my opinion, or worse still, took to the sea. Your trouble's wasted: he'll never come back."

Yet in her old heart she, too, expected him, and greatly longed to see him.

The labourers were not doubtful; for Johnson inclined towards hope, while Emanuel Codd most stoutly declared that Ives would never return to his home.

"Take it how you please," he said. "The stiff neck of the chap will keep him from coming back. He'll have thought out what he's going to do while he was to Tavistock, and it won't be to walk in here, as if he'd only been away for a holiday. And I've thought out what he'll do also; but I ban't going to tell anybody."

Rupert Johnson laughed when he heard the elder speak thus.

"His fancy and yours wouldn't run far alike," he answered. "What you think he'd do, 'tis very certain he won't do. I'll bet you a day's wages he'll be back afore midnight."

But Mr. Codd refused to bet and thereby lost three shillings, for Ives Pomeroy did not come back.

Until twelve o'clock the household sat up for him. Then all retired, and last among them Avisa also went to bed. In her heart she hoped that the wanderer might be waiting for the lights to vanish. She left hot food below and opened a little window at the rear of the house, which was the usual entrance-way of Ives after dark. He did not come, however.

Two nights later hope woke at the sound of a late visitor; but the treble knock, as crisp and formal as his own nature, told of Arthur Brown; and for the first time in her life Lizzie regretted that it was her sweetheart and not another who had come.

"I had much wished to welcome your brother," said the schoolmaster. "But I fear my opinions have proved correct. Has anything been heard of him?"

"Nothing. He was free on Monday morning, and now 'tis Wednesday night and no news."

Brown sighed.

"The fools bring all the trouble into the world," he said. "How does Mrs. Pomeroy bear it?"

"She's herself—goes about everything as usual and leaves a supper every night. She says he won't be long—seems hopeful still."

The young man shook his head.

"She doesn't understand human nature, Lizzie. Perhaps our own flesh and blood is so near and dear to us, that we can't look at a son or a daughter impartially. But, as a student of character, I have studied Ives pretty closely, as you know. Everything that is interesting to you is interesting to me, of course. I never thought to have much

to do with such an irregular man; but he's your brother and it's my duty to try and help him—for my own sake, understand, as well as for yours."

"I only hope you'll have the chance to help him, Arthur. Grandmother's pretty wise, too; and now she doesn't think he'll ever come home again. He swore he wouldn't —we've got to remember that."

"I attach no importance to his swearing," answered the schoolmaster. "These characters, that live without God, don't think anything of an oath, I'm sorry to say. No, he'll consider his own convenience. Personally I should not wonder if he entered upon a period of reckless living."

"You can't do that without money, and he's got none," answered Lizzie.

They went in together, and Mr. Brown talked with Avisa. He ventured to caution her against her sanguine attitude, and she listened patiently; then she prepared a little supper for her son as usual.

"You may be right, but I don't think it. If I know anything, he's not far off. He'll come back presently. 'Tis like taming a shy creature home again after it have once broke loose. It calls for patience. There was something moving nigh the house long after dark last night, and I think I know what 'twas, though there was nought to see."

"It's all so mad and senseless," grumbled the other. "Twenty-five years old and behaving in a way that would be weak-headed if he was twelve. I couldn't have done such things in my childhood, Mrs. Pomeroy."

"I'm sure you couldn't," she said. "But it takes all sorts to make a world—savage and tame. Some be quickly ripe and a credit to their company from their youth up; some calls for wild weather to ripen 'em. My boy will come right, Arthur. Did you mark what he said to the Justice?"

"Yes, yes; you told me, Mrs. Pomeroy. It was a hopeful sign, but——"

"Trust me to know," she said; then rose and left the lovers together. It was her custom to make large excuses for all natures and struggle to find the best in all; but her daughter's future husband tried her a little, and the effort to keep his virtues before her mental eye while he was present in the flesh always wearied her. He belonged to the sort of characters that weak human nature admires most at a distance.

"He shines like a lighthouse, but you can't warm your hands at him," Mrs. Pomeroy once confessed to Rachel Bolt.

Anon Mr. Brown took his leave; and that night a strange thing happened. The dog of Ives barked loudly and joyfully after one o'clock, and the voice of Ives bade it be silent. His mother heard him from her chamber and marked by little familiar sounds every incident that followed.

Breathless, with her bedroom door ajar, she listened, heard the back window opened, marked the footfall in the kitchen.

Beneath was the usual preparation: a lamp turned low, a hot meal put by, plate and glass, knife and fork, and a few words on a piece of paper.

"Supper in the oven, dear heart. Good-night. Mother."

With straining ears she listened, but did not go down to him. She heard stealthy movements, and once the clink of glass. Then, after half-an-hour had passed, the man went out as quietly as he had entered; the window closed; the dog barked again; Ives had come and gone.

But wordless thanksgivings filled his mother's heart. She was sure of him now, and that night she slept as she had not slept since he departed.

At dawn she went down to feast on the sight of his empty plate and the mark of his boots on the floor.

"God bless the dear, wild man," she said to Lizzie. "My word, what a supper he made!"

She was looking about in the fender and on the floor for the scraps of her note which she expected to find; and then, to her daughter's surprise, the mother's voice shook and she clasped the girl's hand very tight and pressed a sudden, splendid emotion into it.

"Mother!" cried Lizzie, "what's come over 'e? How beautiful your eyes shine!"

"He's took my little letter away with him!" whispered Avisa. "He's forgiven me, Lizzie! 'Tis a weather-gleam from the sky for all our hearts!"

Then Mrs. Pomeroy disappeared; and her daughter, greatly wondering, made breakfast ready.

The next night Ives showed no sign; and then he came home altogether. Again his dog barked after one in the morning, and again he returned to his home. He ate his supper, listened to the clock purr two, and heard the gentle rustle of the blackbeetles by the hearth. Then, having eaten and drunk, he took off his boots, lighted a candle and went up to his own room. His mother kept silence and it was not until deep sleep had sunk upon him, that she crept to his bedside for a little while that her hungry heart might beat close to its treasure.

CHAPTER XVI

PETER TAKES THE PLUNGE

At this season circumstances drove Peter Toop seriously to consider the master project of his mind. He had been exceedingly busy over an extension of his business, and now was a mortuary mason as well as undertaker. Henceforth he was prepared to do all that the living can do for the dead.

From the arduous preliminaries of these operations Peter's thoughts again turned towards Ruth Rendle. He told himself that the time was ripe for action, and various circumstances combined to promote activity. First, he believed that the new business might be an increased source of strength in determining her decision; secondly, Peter found that stronger spectacles became necessary to him; and this deterioration of sight pointed to the approach of waning powers in other directions. Lastly, he met with Avisa Pomeroy and she said a word that spurred him to the definite deed. With respect to Joel, the undertaker felt less concern than of yore. Joel, so far as he could note, had ceased to pay very special attention to Ruth; and he no longer appeared particularly enthusiastic about her in private. Indeed, it struck Peter that his brother worked the girl rather too hard, and was imperious and exacting.

But the undertaker did not regard Ruth's acquiescence as certain. He felt hopeful, chiefly on the score of his new business, but he was of a more modest character than Joel, and regarded refusal as a possibility.

Then came chance speech with Mrs. Pomeroy, and he acted upon it.

They met near Christmas opposite the tombstone works, and Mr. Toop insisted upon Avisa entering, that she might

see some pieces of marble he had acquired at a bankrupt's sale.

"From Italy," he said. "God knows I don't want sorrow to come to anybody in particular this winter; but there it is—a very satisfying piece of stone, in my judgment. If you get the sun on it at a certain angle, it shines like the best crystal sugar."

She admired the marble and he ventured on a suggestion.

"I suppose it never struck you to put up a richer monument over Mr. Pomeroy?"

"No," she said. "The Pomeroy headstones lie in a row and be all slate."

"I've nothing against slate," he admitted. "But my feeling is that perhaps it lifts the sentiments to a higher place to see a glittering thing like this. It makes a graveyard more showy, too, and so betters the general character of a district. In my opinion it means a deeper grief also."

"If a grief is a matter of cash, it does," she said.

"'Tis a great subject. I pore over pictures of tombs and their prices of an evening for hours. Upon the whole, I reckon too much is charged for gravestones, ma'am."

"Very like. There's trades that be called upon just when sorrowful hearts think least of pounds and shillings. They all do pretty well, I believe."

"Not that anybody ever has, or ever will have any cause to grumble at me," declared Peter. "The letters that I've got after funerals will make a proud heirloom for my children."

"So they will then—a very kind-hearted, feeling man, as we all know."

"And how might Ives be?"

"He's well and busy about a good few things. Our oak wood comes down next year, I hope. 'Twill be a great year for us."

"I do trust that it may be. And bark was up a bit in the market last spring. I've had a word or two with your

son over the bar. Always liked his fearless way myself, though he've got a powerful lot of wrong opinions, to say it kindly."

"Who hasn't at his age? There's some wrong opinions I like a boy to hold. The world may stamp them out pretty quick, but they show a good fashion of heart."

"As to the world, Ives would seem to think that 'tis all to the young," mused Mr. Toop. He sat on a granite kerbstone and took snuff as he spoke.

"So 'tis to the young," she answered; "and so it always will be, Peter. That's nature."

"Not at all; not at all. Such an idea teaches the young people to be selfish. I'd make 'em a lot more respectful to old age if I had the larning of 'em. Grey hairs don't count a button now-a-days."

She shook her head.

"The young be in a hurry. So was we backalong. 'Tis only the old, with no time left, that take time easily and understand it. Them with their lives before 'em be always short of time if they're good for anything. I like to see it. Patience ban't natural to girls and boys."

"That's true," he admitted. "Nobody knows that better than me with my young, boyish mind. The way I dash at things fairly frightens my brother every day of the week."

"Us can over-do patience without a doubt," she said; and Mr. Toop applied this sentiment to his own case.

"I believe you're right," he answered. "And that idea comes rather pat for me, because I've been worriting to have a go in at a certain project any time this last six months; but something has always come between. Now, though younger than ever in most ways, I can't deny that I've had to get a stronger pair of glasses."

"The natural fires get cool as time works with us."

"With some, with some; not with all. There's such men as Joel, who feel the pinch, and they weak-chested

sort often seem to show time's handiwork sharper than others. But in my case, when time took my hair—which was a trifle, and I'm healthier in summer without it—he 'peared to forget all about me. I've been a man, you must know, who never would get into ruts and grooves, Mrs. Pomeroy. That's the sort that travels terrible fast but not terrible far. I'm the donkey as likes to sample both sides of the hedge, my dear."

She declared this rule of life to be a very wise one, then left him; but he reflected for some time concerning what she had said and her opinion: that danger might lie in over-much patience, finally decided Peter upon an active step.

Joel was bronchitic next Sunday, and did not go to church. Therefore Peter had Ruth to himself for a while, and, as they journeyed home from evensong at Sampford Spiney, he asked her to marry him.

"You're no longer a child," he said, "and more am I, Ruth. You're in the full vigour of womanhood, and I'm a man at the top of his prosperity and hard as a nut in wind and limb—except for a little short sight. Not but what I can read the Ten Commandments by lamplight from my place in the chancel, for I tried to-night, and every word was as clear as if they'd been written on the sacred tables of Moses himself. And though coffins and gravestones ban't loverly material, yet love's love, and money's money, and I never met the love as went the worse for a bit of cash thrown in. The weakest link in a marriage contract be often the man's income, knowing which I've waited to a time when envious souls might even dare to say I was a thought over-ripe. Far from it, Ruth; but even if 'twas true, you've got to balance my mature brow and spectacles against the useful odds of always knowing where to go for a five-pound note. So there you are, my dear. Take it or leave it; but I hope to God you'll take it."

She refused him gently, and with very sincere and grateful thanks for the honour that he had paid her. She explained the impossibility of the thing he suggested and hoped that he would forgive her for declining such a great and splendid proposition.

He took it very calmly, but could not conceal his disappointment.

"It's a crusher," he said, "like a beast of a pill that won't go down easy, but dodges about the gullet and escapes the swallow. However, it's got to go down. Lord knows what I'll do now. Well, you know your own business best, my dear. But if by lucky chance you change——"

"Don't think of that, cousin Peter. Find somebody wiser and better, and a thought older than me. Your kind heart blinds you where I'm concerned. Such as me wouldn't be near good or sensible or wise enough for you."

"Everything seems to go against the order of nature lately," he said. "Not perhaps that 'twas in nature for you to care for me; but so it is. Two nights ago Matthew Northmore came in the bar—that evening you was with Mrs. Pomeroy—and had a whisky hot! Never seed the man take a dram before in my life. He was wet to the skin and shivering, it is true; still he's always spoken against whisky before. Then there's Moleskin; since young Pomeroy's trouble and his own illness, he's changing; a leopard will change its spots next. He talks of giving up sporting. Just think of that! I'll allow that he generally says something about reformation after the fishing season's over; but never before so serious as this year."

"Was it along with him that Ives bided those nights afore he came home?"

"Yes; but leave that. I can't talk of common things as if nought had happened."

"You must apply yourself to this like everything else," she told him. "Such an energetic, popular man as you can find the right wife easily enough."

"I thought I had," he answered. "You mustn't think I've got no heart. This has shook me something terrible. 'Twill be months afore I can begin to look round again."

"Don't let it be months, cousin Peter. Go out into the world more and see the people."

"Something tells me it will be some dead man's leavings now," he said gloomily. "I'd high hopes of you, Ruth; but, failing you, I shan't think no more of the maidens. I was a young man afore I offered myself to you; now I feel ten year older and haven't got the heart to hope for anything above a widow. Not even a young widow. My spirits have sunk down to the thought of quite an elderly person. I trust 'twill spring up again; but just for the moment you've even knocked the hope of a family out of me—cruel as it may seem to say so."

"You'll find just the right one—and I'll help you if I can."

"Thank you, I'm sure; but my business be more likely to help me. I suppose that Providence knew you'd say 'no,' Ruth; and so it led me to the tombstones. I'll find some weeping creature presently, I suppose, and say the word in season. Not that I look forward to it with much appetite at present. However, you'll always be a friend —eh, Ruth?"

"Always a true, loving friend, cousin. I don't forget and never shall forget how much I owe you."

"Then keep your eyes open on my account. And there's just one thing. I've no right to dictate, but I'm human, and I know you'll marry somebody sooner or late—such a fine girl naturally will do so—but I must ask you, out of respect to me, Ruth, not to take Joel. You may say I've no right to warn you off him; and as to 'right,' perhaps I have not. But I'm a stickler for law and order and propriety in general, and it wouldn't be at all nice having refused the younger man to take the older. I'm sure your

good sense sees that. So I must ask you once for all not to take Joel."

"I promise faithfully," she answered.

"He may ask or he may not," continued Peter. "But he's very little sense of his own bodily failings and might look as high, not seeing the absurdity of such an idea. However, I've got your word, so there's an end of that."

They entered *The Jolly Huntsmen* as they spoke, and Joel, without much difficulty, perceived by his brother's manner and loss of appetite that something out of the common had happened.

A week later Ruth, after certain conferences with those who wished her well, decided to leave *The Jolly Huntsmen,* since her presence there had lifted this shadow between the proprietors.

Northmore it was who first urged the step. She met him in a downcast mood and did not hesitate to explain the situation without mentioning the fact of the double proposal.

"I know you care, and I know you're wise," she said. "The truth is that Peter and Joel both like me and they quarrel over me and say unkind things to me about each other. 'Twould be terrible to come between the good men —a poor payment for all their kindness."

"Leave them," he answered, and his heart felt a throb of hope. "Let me do what I can. I've friends in business. If you must work, let me try and get something for you."

"No, no. I can find work, I think. The point is to leave here. I think a lot of your opinion, Mr. Northmore —yours and Mrs. Pomeroy's. You say 'go.' I'll ask her, too, and see if she says the same."

The man took the opportunity and pleaded his cause again. He showed how simple a road led from the difficulty and ended at Stone Park; but she could none of him.

CHAPTER XVII

REFORMATION

On the Sunday that followed Christmas Day Arthur Brown and Ives Pomeroy walked from church together homeward. A very amazing circumstance had upset the prayerful spirit of the congregation, for there appeared in the house of prayer one who was never known before to visit it; and his advent banished both somnolence and devotion from the little company of worshippers. All, even to the school-children, experienced a thrill and flutter before the spectacle of Moleskin in the house of his Maker. Mary Cawker accompanied her father, and while he appeared to derive some slight entertainment from the immense impression created by his black coat and his appearance upon his knees, the woman was obviously excited and hysterical. For this triumph, in her own opinion, largely belonged to Mary. After service the desire for information concerning phenomena so strange was general; but the poacher and his daughter were not seen; they entered the vestry and stopped there until the people had dispersed.

Arthur Brown felt this event might happily form matter for improving reflections, and spoke to his future brother-in-law as they proceeded home to dinner at Vixen Tor Farm.

"It shows how none is forgotten," he said. "It seems to me to prove that God watches and waits His own time, and then, when the soul is ripe and ready, He makes His way into it and the still small voice speaks to a man. You see it is never too late to hope. You came to sense and reason by being chastened, Ives—at least, all who care for you are hoping so; and this bad old man, though he

has escaped so far, has in his grey hairs apparently seen the light at last."

Ives sneered.

"That's what you think. Always ready to credit people with pious motives—all but me. And I wasn't chastened at all; and only a man like you would mention it. If you'd heard what that big-minded Justice of the Peace said to me, it might have opened your eyes a bit. Any way, you were the only man that ever had the mean mind to say one single word to me on the subject after I came home again."

"I felt it my duty to do so," answered the schoolmaster.

"Your duty always takes the shape to make somebody else sting for it. It's your inclination oftener than your duty that makes you so damned nasty to people."

"You always try to raise anger in me, and you never succeed," said Mr. Brown. "I wish you'd give up attempting it, because it is only wasting your time. You are selfish and don't see what a serious thing your disgrace has been for me. I have some self-respect, if you have none, and I tell you candidly that I thought twice about any union with your family last autumn."

"Did you? Well, take my advice and don't think again. You're under contract to marry my sister, I believe, and the poor little fool thinks that you are a model man and a hero, and God knows what else. And you'll marry her whatever I may do or not do in the meantime. Mark that, you canting prig! You marry her in due season, or I'll break your neck for you. Pomeroys are not good enough for things like you, I suppose! Christ Almighty, I'll forget my promises and be angry myself in a minute!"

"Don't think I fear you," answered the other. "Very far from that, I assure you. There is nothing about you that an intellectual man need fear."

"You marry my sister, that's all. Let me hear one

word more about us not being good enough, and you'll wish you hadn't been born. And if you're a minute late on the morning of the day, I'll come and drag you into church by your long nose!"

"How *can* you be so vulgar?" asked the schoolmaster coldly. "Really you're a hopeless man—perfectly hopeless. 'Reformation!' It's ridiculous to apply the word to you."

"Who did?" asked the other. "Damn reformation! A likely thing that anybody who's got to run up against you every week would reform. 'Tis your sort made Christ Himself lose His temper. And well He might!"

"I hope that Mr. Cawker will take higher views in future," said Brown.

"Higher views! He's often thought of doing this in the winter, when there's nothing doing. He's having a lark, I'll bet. All you sheep-faced people rolling your eyes and whispering, and him down on his hassock laughing fit to burst in his sleeve, I'll swear."

Mrs. Pomeroy was unwell and had not come to church. Ives asked after her immediately on his return home, learned that she was not better, and relapsed into gloom. Avisa dined with the company; then she retired to her room; Mrs. Jane Pomeroy went to sleep; the lovers walked out together, and Ives, slightly curious to know the truth concerning Moleskin, went up the hill to visit his friend.

It seemed that the cynical theory of Ives was erroneous, for Mr. Cawker took himself very seriously. Not a jest did he let fall. Humility and triumph strove for mastery in his mind, and young Pomeroy found himself at a loss.

"All straight, this here wonderful reformation?" he asked.

"Solemn truth, my son, and to prove it I'll tell you how cruel sorry I am as ever I led you out of the narrow road."

"Nothing of the sort. You didn't influence me. I went my own way and always shall do."

"Well, I can't say the same; you did influence me. When you—came out of clink—to say it as one sinner to another, I watched to see what you'd do, and marked that you began to run straight and stand steadily to work. 'Twas a noble sight and did more than one backslider good, I promise you."

"More fools them. I didn't stand to work more than I chose, and never shall. With my opinions——"

"Drop 'em! Drop 'em," said Moleskin earnestly. "Do like me and give over them devilish ideas about equality and the land to the poor. 'Tis all wrong, Ives; and, old though I am, I see it. The rich be the act of God, and He have planned that their first care be the poor. It's come to me as clear as the light to Paul. It ban't for us to help ourselves: 'tis for them to help us. 'Tis their blessed privilege and duty to look after the meek and lowly. The Lord put 'em here to do it. And we must give 'em the opportunity as we can."

Pomeroy stared; then he laughed.

"Don't make that ungodly noise," said the poacher. "A sneering laugh hurts my ear like a curse since I changed. There's nowt to laugh at, if you'm a serious-minded man. And Lord knows, looking back, I can't see much to laugh at, anyway."

"I should think you was weeping drunk, if I didn't know," said Ives.

"No, no; only enough for health in future. What was it I said to parson in the vestry a bit ago, Mary?"

"You said such a terrible lot to him," answered his daughter proudly; "words flowed out of you, like feathers off a goose."

"So they did. I felt as though I could preach so well as him; and I may even come to that when the people have got to take me serious."

"Not likely they ever will. I won't for one," declared Ives.

He marked the attitude of Moleskin's women. His wife was very silent. She seemed absolutely sceptical and, from her couch, watched the reformed sinner with unsympathetic eyes; but Mary evidently felt the glow and glory of this noble change. Her voice was full of tears and her mind in a highly emotional condition.

"I put it plain afore parson," continued Moleskin. "I said, 'Until now, your reverence, I've been like the moon and only shone by night—God forgive me for it. But never again—no more works of darkness for me,' I said. 'All be changed,' I told him; and then I give this here woman credit for it, because I must tell you, Pomeroy, that Mary be largely answerable for my salvation. 'Twas just after Christmas dinner that her fell upon me like a cat-a-mountain—not with her claws, but with her tongue. In fact, she bally-ragged me proper; yet not her, but the voice of the Lord speaking through her. She made me right down terrified. I didn't sleep at all that night, and with morning light I fetched out this here black coat, not put on since my father's funeral; a sign of grace, though the moth was in it. However, 'twill do very well Sundays till I've made some honest money and can buy a new one."

"Honest money's easier to talk about than to earn for the likes of you, Mr. Cawker," said his wife rather coldly.

"Don't you think that," he said. "If there's joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, as parson said to me to-day, so much the more should there be joy among a sinner's own fellow-creatures. I've a perfect right to expect good work and good wages now this minute. 'Tis the duty and glory of the neighbourhood to give 'em to me; I demand 'em. In fact, I told parson that a man such as me, well up in years and full of general learning, ought to get rather extra good wages."

"He kept harping on the past, however," said Mary

Cawker; "then father got a bit tired of that and up and told him straight out that the past was over, and that it didn't become a Christian man to go back to it any more. 'Tis the future I've come to you about, your reverence,' said father. Didn't you, my dear?"

"I did," answered Mr. Cawker. "The man couldn't get off the poaching, and he also reminded me as I used to sing naughty songs for money here and there, and so on, and so on. But I told him 'twas all over and that he needn't remind me of the past. 'Tis the most Christian way to forget all about that; and for my part, I shall be the first to do so,' I told him."

Ives roared with laughter; Moleskin looked aggrieved; and Mary spoke indignantly.

"You didn't ought to take it so, Mr. Pomeroy. You're worse than mother."

"As for me," answered the sick woman, "I've knowed Mr. Cawker a good few years longer than what either of you have. If talk was religion, I'd be the first to take a hopeful view. But as it ban't, I won't pretend what I don't feel. Us'll see where we'm all standing this day twelvemonth."

"You'm a rummy old jibes!" said the poacher. "But you be quite right not to trust me. An itemy[1] man—to my shame I say it. But 'tis all over now. I shall go to work, no doubt, with the best, so soon as the Lord do find my task."

Ives scoffed again.

"'Twill take parson all his time to get you a straight job, old chap."

"So he seemed to think," confessed Mary; but her father would not allow this.

"Not at all; you're quite mistook," he answered. "I grant that at first he seemed a thought taken, too, when I comed in the vestry and demanded honest work from the Lord's minister. But after I'd talked to him a bit, he

[1] Itemy: Tricky.

quite saw it in the proper light; and he's going to stir himself about it. And to church I go again to-night and always hereafter. The labourer is worthy of his hire, however, and I made that quite clear to his reverence."

Ives spoke to Mary.

"How did parson take it?" he asked.

"Pleased and puzzled both," she answered. "He was terrible delighted to find father at the footstool of Grace, as well he might be; but it surprised him rather to see father so wide awake like at the same time. Of course father can't help being a very clever old man, even at a solemn time like that was. In fact, you might say that father drove rather a hard bargain with his reverence."

"Quite wrong," declared Moleskin. "There's right and reason in all things. I've completely reformed; that's old history now. You can see with the naked eye 'tis so by these clothes alone; and if you could look into my mind, you'd find that was also changed most amazing. But 'tis my rule in life to carry my goods to the best market; and that holds all round, whatever you've got to sell. Here be I with a saved soul; and I take it to them as deals in such things. 'Tis a great feather in parson's cap, you must remember; worth good money to him, in fact, because it shows he's earning his own money. And if he'd been in any shadow of doubt, I'd soon have gone straight off to Pastor Biles at the Wesleyan shop. Yes, I would! 'Tis all one to me what brand of Christian I become; and for that matter, I never had no great liking for the Establishment. But times are bad, even for the saved sinner, and us reformed characters ain't fussed about near so much as the Bible says we ought to be. Therefore I go to parson first, because he's in touch with the bettermost and more likely to get me high-paid work than t'other. And, no doubt, for his own credit's sake he will do so."

Mr. Cawker sighed, lit his pipe, and mended the fire.

"'Tis a very gracious and comforting feeling to throw

your cares on another pair of shoulders," he said. "If I'd known what 'twas to reform, I make no doubt but I should have done it long ago. You go on with it, too, Ives. You've begun as well as me. Don't be a backslider any more than I shall."

"Us'll live to see you a sidesman yet, and teaching in the Sunday School, perhaps," said the younger man; "but they won't let you take round the money-dish, I'm afraid —not yet a while."

"Don't laugh no more," urged the poacher. "This is a very solemn, heart-shaking circumstance. 'Tis bad enough for my own wife to feel doubts about me holding out, let alone you."

Mary was going into Merivale presently, and Ives returned with her. They left Moleskin about to read the Bible aloud to Mrs. Cawker; and while he turned the pages slowly, she regarded him with frosty distrust.

"Mind," were the last words that Ives heard her say; "mind this; if you'm not in sober, God-fearing earnest, but only playing at it to gain your own ends, so like as not the Lord will strike you dead where you sit, Mr. Cawker; and who'd blame Him?"

"Tell me," said Pomeroy, as he and Mary went down the hill amid scattered homes of bygone men; "is this really true? He seemed in sober earnest—for him."

"True enough," she said, "and I'm responsible for it. I be terrible anxious for it to go right; yet there's a doubt in my mind that his reformation ban't built on solid ground. It comed about in a very curious fashion. He thinks 'twas one thing did it, but I know 'twas quite another; and that makes me a thought doubtful like."

"Tell me," he said; "or if you don't want to do that tell my mother. She's a lot wiser than me, anyway."

"I'll tell you," the woman answered. "'Twas like this here: just after Christmas dinner something woke in me and, after mother had shed a few tears, I found my tongue

for once, and up and spoke to father straight from the heart. I won't deny that there was a pinch of temper, too, for the very goose we'd ate comed from a doubtful place, and somebody had bred and raised it for nought but his trouble. 'You'm a cruel, wicked old shaver!' I said to my father—'a sinful, scandalous, ancient man as be a shame to the country-side; and well you know it. I wouldn't be you for all the world,' I said; 'and some night you'll be took off, like a bird off a tree. And if you come to be knocked over the head with all your terrible outrageous sins upon you, where d'you think you'll spend eternity, you woeful man? Never a minute you'll have,' I told him; 'and 'twill be too late then to ax for pardon with you getting nearer your grave every day.' I kept running on like that, fiercer and fiercer, for a matter of half an hour; and first father was astonished a good bit; and then he gived off laughing; and then his pipe went out, and finally, by the grace of God, he seed what I was driving at and decided to be saved. But the point be this, Mr. Pomeroy. He's often thought of them words I spoke so furious and said 'twas good angels speaking through my lips, same as the Lord spoke through the prophets; but the solemn, secret truth be this: 'twasn't the Lord, nor angels neither, but three whole glasses of brown sherry wine as I drank down along with that stolen goose. It made mother cry and turned me over-bold. It got in my blood, and in my head, and I felt that I must have a dash at something and keep talking for dear life, or else I'd roll over on the floor; so I had a dash at father. But if he found out where my valour rose from, I'm very much afraid the old man would turn back again to his dark dealings to-morrow."

"No, he wouldn't," declared Ives; "he's going to see if the game of repentance be worth the candle. And very like he'll find it is so. Anyway, you needn't bother your head about it, Mary. 'Twas you gived him the idea, cer-

tainly; all the rest is only his way. He can't change at his time of life."

"I hope he can. To show you how much he's in earnest, I know for a fact that he took out all his wicked, slaying tools two nights ago, and buried 'em deep in the earth."

"Ah! safe place for 'em till he sees which way the cat jumps. I hope he'll never dig 'em up again. He's taught me my lesson, too—old blackguard. Not that I bear him much of a grudge for it. But he won't catch me napping again."

"I'm sure he won't catch nobody again," she said. "He's been caught himself—by the Lord."

"We'll hope so. Everybody expected 'twas quite a different party would catch him. However, if he's got to see that all that talk about socialism is silly nonsense, that's something. Though I dare say he never did believe it himself, but only said it to have a laugh at me."

They parted, and Ives returned home. He found his mother still in some discomfort, and forgot the great incident of the day in his solicitude for her. It was decided he should drive Avisa to Tavistock on the following morning, that her indisposition might be examined and explained. This return of fears forgotten cast gloom upon the hearts at Vixen Tor.

CHAPTER XVIII

GREAT MIS TOR

From the rocky breast of Great Mis Tor on a day in spring, those many miles that separated this little mountain from the sea stretched but as a span. Crushed by perspective, whole parishes huddled together like the sections of a child's puzzle map. Forests were a thumbnail large, rivers traversed the expanse in bright threads; wide fields appeared but as cubes and lozenges spattered upon this mosaic; while hamlets and homesteads shrank to mere pin points dotted upon the undulations of the land. Only the horizons of the sea were huge, where the little scroll of the earth ended and the waters rolled onward to the edge of the world. They and the actual Moor itself, that stretched in waves of peat and flung up pinnacles of granite instead of foam, were obviously immense; but the inhabited regions between them appeared reduced almost to nothing by the sleights of space. Yet rare beauty reigned upon the earth. The cloud shadows that swept it with islands of purple, brightened the glitter of the sunshine by contrast with their wandering gloom; and between these fleeting shades the light fell in a rain of splendour—fell and sought and found villages and church towers, that flashed like signals to the beholder before they vanished again in shadow. The light ran along rivers; illuminated lofty wastes; brought out unguessed knaps and points; spread broadly on some remote huddle of slate roofs; flashed stars from far-off waterfalls; faded and misted in mellow hazes above the tender vision of the sea. Over the distant Channel cloud shadows and sunshine mingled in blue and gold, and swept, dimmer than light, brighter

than shade, to wash the ocean, the land and the sky with their diaphanous wonder.

Far away amid deep-bosomed hills and hanging woods, Tamar's silver rolled to the sea and, with a loop of light, separated the counties of the West. A grey thread alone linked them where a bridge spanned the tidal waters, and beside it keen eyes, even from this spot, might see ships of old time still floating—veterans that had borne the stroke of bygone battles, and virgins that had known no bridal of fire, but passed from the front rank of national defence into the limbo of obsolete things without being called to strike a blow for the men that made them.

The more immediate scene embraced Dartmoor's own ridges, bogs, deep water-worn valleys and natural fortifications. To the west towered the trinity of the Staple Tors, and beyond them rose Cox and Roose. Shrunk from this elevation to a mere blot in the valley at stream side, the Vixen squatted, and beyond it Pu erected ragged ridges. The east was hidden, and the whole mass of Great Mis itself was softened somewhat by a heath fire that leisurely gnawed the wilderness with red teeth and lifted before its progress a vapour of azure and transparent smoke. This veil swept gently over the summit of the hills, over the buttresses and rocky heights, the avalanches of scattered stone, the single pinnacles and the grassy slopes and coombes between. All were touched with a lustre of pearl that lightened the grey of the granite and heightened the green of the herbage until they shone transformed by these smoke wreaths into something foreign and unreal. It was as though Nature had picked up a wrong palette for a moment.

Spring did not forget the high Moor. Her swift feet had trodden the waste and left warm pressure of their passing, so that little humble buds and blossoms made ready and the pallor of the winter herbage waned. There spread a glow of genial russet amid the rocks, and the

whortle put on the red of life—a hue very different to the red of death that autumn summons. Each spike of unfolding foliage blushed to its top and made a ruddy harmony with the drooping blossom bells.

Ives Pomeroy was returning from fishing, and now he stayed a while and screwed up his eyes that he might make out a figure that approached him. She was a woman, and first he failed to recognize her, and then, as she approached to within a quarter of a mile of him, he knew her.

This man's life progressed unevenly. He was wayward, now fluttered hope in those who cared for him, now awakened depression, or anger, or indifference. The folk were very tolerant for his mother's sake, and she, pursuing the way of her own sanguine heart, swiftly recognized any flash of larger ambition, riper knowledge and ampler patience in his nature. She seldom erred and the improvements that she discerned were often genuine; but some of these dawns were false, and occasionally a harsh sequel followed indications of advancement. He possessed as yet no stability and was hard to live with. Little reverence belonged to him, but his mother knew that love of justice formed a large part of his character. And upon this, together with her knowledge of herself and her dread self of the past, she hopefully built.

Avisa had suffered physical trials during this early spring, and was but lately returned home after undergoing an operation at Tavistock Cottage Hospital. She mended now, and the neighbours rejoiced to know it.

Jill Bolt approached young Pomeroy, and his first thought was to plunge off the footpath and put some distance between them; then curiosity changed his intention, and he determined to hold on and pass her. They met, as they had sometimes met of late before. On these occasions Ives regarded Jill and she turned her face from

him; but to-day he was astonished to find that she returned his glance; then she stopped; and then she spoke.

He had not heard her voice for many months and it moved him somewhat. Moreover the tone was humble and the words were meek.

"May I speak to you, Mr. Pomeroy?" she said.

He gasped. A thousand grievances seemed to perish in the very sound of her voice.

"Yes, you may," he answered. "I've seed you once or twice out here. Why for have you took to roaming, Mrs. Bolt?"

"I suppose you wouldn't be so kind as to call me 'Jill' again?"

He did not answer, and she continued.

"I walk for two reasons; because my husband's mother be always at me to take exercise and keep tramping for my coming little one's sake, and because I like it. Walking takes me out of earshot of my mother in-law."

He listened to the sound rather than to the sense of her speech.

He nodded with his mother's nod.

"Sit here," he said. "'Twas a black day for you when you quarrelled with me, Jill."

"I know it."

"And a black day for me, too. You've heard all that's happened to me. A man like me ban't built to be thrown over that way without paying somebody. I fell foul of people in general and ended by attacking the rich, because they tread on the poor. But it was only an excuse to break loose, Jill. You'd set me festering and the poison had to out."

"I beg you to forgive me, Mr. Pomeroy."

"Call me 'Ives.' There's been enough damned nonsense between us, and it's wrecked my life and gone far to spoil yours. But you can call me 'Ives,' I suppose. I forgive you, of course. No use to do otherwise."

She looked at his profile as he sat beside her with his face turned to the summit of Great Mis Tor.

"You've suffered only less than me," she said. "I see it there on your face. Why was I born to make you an unhappy man? Such impatience—such cruel, wicked pride. Oh, my God, what a fool I was!"

He hesitated, then spoke.

"You shan't say that, Jill. You was a woman and the weaker thing. I know now you weren't all in the wrong. I've thought about it often enough. You was very much tempted, and I ought to have seen it at the time and been more patient and reasonable. I cut my own throat in a manner of speaking. Moleskin showed me that when 'twas too late, and he knows a lot about women. I ban't a patient man, worse luck, and I lost my temper at the wrong time, and didn't call it home again soon enough."

"You shan't say these things now. The fault was mine, and the punishment be mine also."

"As to that——"

"I know you missed me a bit; but you've got the world to choose from; you're free. I'm done for."

He was interested and marked her hopeless voice.

"'Done for!' That's a hard saying. I suppose you'll have what you took him for—his uncle's money?"

"Blast the money! That's gone safe enough and I'm cruel punished ever for thinking of it; though, all the same, God's my judge that 'twasn't love of the money first, but anger at you made me take him. But living with him! If you or any other man only knowed the nature of Samuel: everything that's mild and tasteless. He's invalid food, that man! He makes me sick, I tell you—sick at his tame goodness. You, that be all up and down, and sulks and laughter, and anger and red hot worship—you that I know so well for all we're parted forever—you can't understand what 'tis to be so holy in character. He ought to be in Heaven, and I wish to God

he was. Nothing to find fault with—but everything. I hate goodness since I married that man. I hate patience and meekness, and giving way to everybody—like hell, I hate 'em. Never an unkind thought of any living creature. Never a bit of news—never even a crooked word. That righteous and pious—there, I could shriek out swear words myself sometimes to anger him, but 'twould be in vain. And his awful flute—like a lamb bleating for its mother. I'd thank God on my knees if he'd come home drunk and beat me for a change—anything—anything's better than such a saint. He'm like a man made of potatoes—no taste to him—body or soul."

"That's him right enough," admitted Ives. "I always said and always will say you was a red rat marrying a white mouse. You had a fine flame in you always. With that brave, fiery hair, you was bound to be hot."

He looked at her great mane and was silent.

"Nothing like it nowheres else," he said, being shaken from the matter in hand by this physical splendour. "Lovely as ever. I'd have been a better father for that child coming than him; and a better husband for you than him."

His frankness did not disconcert her. She sighed and asked after his mother.

"I hope Mrs. Pomeroy be strong again?"

"Yes, she is; but not all we could wish yet. Doctor says we must look sharp after her for a year or two at least. However, she'll soon be herself again, I think. The doctors say she made a splendid recovery and tell us we've every right to hope she'll never fall so ill again. All the same, there's a little fear."

"I wish some of they doctors wasn't such fools. Do you mind when you rated me, Ives, because you said I was marrying Bolt for his hopes of money?"

"Well, and didn't you?"

"No, I'll swear I didn't—not only for the money. The

thought of it helped me to decide; but it wouldn't have counted against you—if—you——"

"Better leave that now," he said. "I'm punished enough."

"Anyway us won't get it."

"Why not?"

"Because his uncle ban't going to die!"

"He must die sooner or late."

"He's only sixty or thereabout, and the London doctor found as he hadn't got death in him at all. 'Twas his liver; and now the man eats proper meat and takes long walks and so on, and he's getting spryer every day."

"Your luck's out all round then. I wish to God you'd never quarrelled with me, Jill."

"Don't I? 'Tis a poor plight for a woman of character. Sometimes I feel that desperate that I could run away or cut my throat—anything to get out of it."

"Time will tame you—same as it will me, I suppose."

"Never!"

"Winter and wedlock tames maids and beasts. You was far too fine a piece for a poor ninnyhammer like Bolt. Still it might be worse. I suppose he does your bidding. I dare say he'd have made a better husband than me—here and there."

She put her hand on his.

"Don't say that, Ives."

"Leave your hand where 'tis," he said, with a voice unsteady.

For a time neither spoke; then Jill rose.

"Us better not meet no more. It puts wicked thoughts in me," she remarked quietly.

"Wicked be damned," he said. "Half the things men call wicked be no more than natural. Wicked's only a man's word. Everything that be worth thinking about be wicked, if you listen to they frosty people as call themselves good."

"Anyway we won't go back together. I'll go on my walk and you get home."

He opened his creel, took out some trout, made a neat parcel of them with brake-fern and rushes, then tied all with a piece of string.

"There," he said. "Good-bye! Keep up your pluck. You never know what may happen."

"Good-bye, and thank you, Ives."

He turned his back upon her and went his way, while she did not move for some time. From under her pale eyelashes she watched him dwindle. She knew a great deal about his past and was familiar with his behaviour in the present. People began to regard him as an amended young man. He kept more at home and worked harder at his business. With regard to women, none could say that he specially affected any girl's society for the moment. During his mother's illness Ives had ridden twice or thrice weekly to Tavistock. Now Avisa was at home again and her son and daughter ceased not to minister to her. These efforts only relaxed when Avisa, now restored to health, took her place and controlled the affairs of the home as usual.

Jill thought of what she had lost and what she had gained. Upon the whole this interview cheered her a good deal. The effect of resting her hand upon that of Ives impressed her with immense possibilities. She wished that her child would come quickly; and in her heart she hoped that it would quickly go again.

Ives Pomeroy fell in with Ruth Rendle on his homeward way, and since she was proceeding to Vixen Tor Farm to see his mother, he escorted her. He appeared very full of the griefs of Jill Bolt and uttered a flood of indignant protests. He scorned the woman's husband and declared that her mother-in-law was enough to make any sane wife commit a crime. The subject entirely possessed

his mind, and he made no secret of his recent conversation.

"A cruel thing for any proper spirited woman to be choked between them two stupid creatures. There'll be a flare up presently, if I know anything about her."

He ranted on at the unutterable misery of Jill, and Ruth listened patiently while Ives vented many lawless opinions, and for the time being gave no indications whatever of his alleged improvement in sense and sobriety. She was glad when they reached the farm and he left her with Mrs. Pomeroy. But this he did not do until he had described his interview to his mother, and poured Jill's wrongs into Avisa's ears.

And his old sweetheart sat on till daylight waned. Then, like an enchanter, the mighty tor began to weave its own cloud-cap before her eyes and draw down from the firmament a nimbus of dark vapours. This grey fleece limned magically under sunset light, spread, and swelled and rolled downward from the hidden mountain top in pearly billows. There was no wind and the fog increased, filled Walla's deep glen beneath the tor, and came presently to the face of the woman where she still sat and pondered. At its touch, the sense of reality returned to her brooding spirit. She banished certain dreams that painted another pattern of life than the true one, sighed impatiently, and turned to go home. For a milè she walked, and was just about leaving the Moor and entering Merivale, when she remembered the gift of the trout. These she had quite forgotten and left at her resting-place. She did not want them; but the remote possibility that Ives might pass that way again, remember the spot as their meeting-place, pay it extra attention, and find his fish, decided her to return. Already weary, she tramped back again into the fog, found her old lover's gift, and took it home with her.

Samuel was waiting for his supper, and his hunger and

resignation alike irritated her. When she showed him the trout and told him the name of the giver, her husband appeared too much astonished to say anything.

"You'd better go in and ax your mother if I ought to eat 'em or not," she said, knowing that he would miss the satire.

"A very proper thought, Jill. I will do so," he answered. "For my part, as a large-minded man, I can't see no cause against. But mother, aggravating to you though she may be sometimes, poor dear, have sense enough for the pair of us still. If she says the fish did ought to be ate, you can have 'em for breakfast; if not, I'll give 'em to somebody else, and tell Pomeroy that I've done so. Of course, he'll see the hidden meaning of that and take the hint in future."

"You may save yourself the trouble," answered his wife. "There's some things still as I dare to make up my own mind about, and I'm going to eat these fish for my supper."

Samuel looked rather nervous, and his mouth opened while he reflected.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "'Tisn't as if he'd catched 'em deliberate for you. That I would not have stood for a moment—no man of spirit could be expected to do it. But, since you met by accident and the fish was caught, and the idea to give you a few comed in his mind, it might be mean not to feed on 'em. Belike 'twas a sort of peace-offering, poor man, and I hope a sign of grace. But I'll take none. You cook 'em, Jill, and keep the three biggest for yourself, and I'll pop over to mother with the rest."

CHAPTER XIX

A THUNDER PLANET

Some differences of opinion between the brothers Toop culminated in words on a day in August. The matter concerned with Ruth, who had at last told them that she intended to leave Merivale. This startling decision was now in their ears, and they discussed it privately.

"Peter," said Joel shortly, "this is your work."

"On the contrary," answered his brother, "if it's anybody's work, it's yours."

"You'd better explain that."

"So I will then. 'Tis your bullying have done this. I say 'bullying.'"

Joel stared. Then he snorted.

"More likely your foolish, clumsy love-making! Don't think that I haven't seen through it. Not likely she can suffer an old fogey like you, and you ought to have known better—you with your many natural infirmities."

"This is rather too much," said Peter. "If you wasn't so puffed up with your own importance, brother, and if you knew a little more how a man ought to treat the gentler creature, you'd see that what you are vulgar enough to call 'clumsy love-making' be just ordinary, proper behaviour, as between friends. For a friend she always will be to me. I have her word for that."

Joel started; then light shone from his face and he laughed unpleasantly.

"So that's it! You've given yourself away properly now, Peter Toop. They never talk that stuff about always being friends until a man have asked 'em to be something more."

"Don't they?" said Peter, growing very red and stick-

ing out his beard. "And how do you come to know such a lot about it? What if I did ask her to have me? It's not a crime, I believe. She won't have you anyway. You don't know how to treat a woman."

"No," answered Joel, "she will not have me, as you say so politely. I happen to know that, because I proposed to her in the usual way. I may or I may not have put it more gentleman-like than what you did. But where sense is lacking, a man's powerless. She decided against me."

"And that's why you've worked her so hard ever since, and been so sharp, I suppose?"

"Well, it made a difference to my feelings naturally. As for hard work, who works harder than me? She's not afraid of hard work, and she's not going because of me at all; she's going because of you."

"She's *not* going," said Peter positively. "If I'm anybody here, she's not going to leave *The Jolly Huntsmen.*"

"So far as that goes, I don't want her to leave any more than you do."

"I don't care what you want or what you don't want," retorted Peter. "You've been very rude to me to-day, and I'm a good deal shocked to think of the coarse things that you've said."

There came the sound of a galloping horse and both, glancing from the window, saw Matthew Northmore ride past on his way to Tavistock.

"Wonder how that man put it to her," mused Joel. "For put it he did. I've very little doubt that he offered himself—maybe more than once."

"I hadn't thought of him."

"I'll tell you the sober truth," continued Joel with gathering excitement, "and the wonder is one or t'other of us didn't see it sooner. Ban't us that have made that girl want to go: 'tis yonder man! He's plaguing her with his long face and won't take 'no' for an answer,

Mark me, 'tis him, not me or you, that be driving her away."

Joel was obviously comforted by this reflection. One might have observed the balm of a restored self-respect oozing up into his face. Peter agreed with him and congratulated him on his perception.

"It only remains to stop him bothering her and make it worth her while to bide along with us," he said. "And that I'll do if money can do it. But the money will be my affair. I be going to give her five shillings a week out of my private cash, Joel."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"If you feel called to fling away your money. . . ."

"Yes, I do. What's money to me? I don't suppose I shall marry at all now."

"Not marry! You can talk about not marrying so calmly!"

"Yes, I can. The next best thing to being happy yourself is to make somebody else so. And, anyway, even if I change my mind, and the right one comes along, five shillings a week won't break me."

"I shall marry myself, and very soon, too, if 'tis only to read that woman a lesson," said Joel. "Seen as I am —merely single—none can picture the husband I'll be; but when the deed is done and I've took a wife and blessed her with my substance, then Ruth's eyes will be opened, and she'll begin to understand what she's missed."

"That's spiteful," declared Peter. "However, go your way. And I'm sorry if I said anything improper or disrespectful to you, Joel."

"Granted," answered the other. "Certainly we must not quarrel over a silly child. Come in the bar and we'll tell her what you've decided to do."

Voices, however, fell upon their ears as they approached, and Ruth did not learn her good fortune until the evening.

It was seldom that Samuel Bolt appeared as a morning

customer, but upon this sultry day of July he came to drink. There was much upon his mind, and he found a sympathetic listener in Ruth, and repaid her with dreadful boredom—the usual reward of sympathetic people.

"I may be a father any minute now," said Samuel. "The time has come and I live in a bath of presspiration, to tell the truth. Jill's that calm that my mother says 'tis out of nature and all against the cheel. Jill might have done her part better, I must say. My mother told me what was right, and I told Jill. But my mother was a lot too wise to tell Jill herself. She's the very masterpiece of sense, and yet——" he broke off and emptied his mug. "A drop more cider," he said. "I'm rather downdaunted to-day. There's a thunder planet reigning, I reckon, or else such things couldn't be. I pray God us shan't have a frightful storm afore my child be born."

"I hope all your anxiety will soon be changed into happiness," said Ruth.

"I'm sure I hope it will," he answered. "But to be secret with you, my dear, there are times when I get very much niffed and that vexed, I could almost stamp my foot or use a wrong word. The mischief is that both of 'em is so fond of me that they quarrel for sheer love of my comfort. The most cruel thing that ever happened to me fell out last Friday morning."

"I'm very sorry, Samuel."

"You'd be sorrier still if you knowed." He hesitated then spoke. "I'll tell you—yes, I will, because you'm a very understanding woman and it may be a lesson. Of course you understand my mother's great care never to say or do anything that can possibly vex my wife."

"I'm sure 'tis so."

"Well, o' Thursday, when I was to work, they had words, and my mother went back to her own house more determined than ever to do nothing that anybody could say was interference. I had a tell with her in the evening

and heard the particulars. 'Twas some items about the nurse, which I couldn't be expected to follow. But Jill had told my mother that my mother was near forty years behind the times in the matter of child-bearing—an unkind thing to say, no doubt. And mother told me that never again, so long as she lived, would she offer Jill one word of advice. I calmed the old dear down so well as I might and didn't doubt 'twould be all right in a day or so; but very next morning a curious thing happened. Our house-door was open and the garden gate was unlatched, and mother was sitting as usual at her window behind they red geraniums she grows so well. Jill happened to be down the street, I believe, but mother says she didn't know that. However, what should come in our garden but one of Joel Toop's pigs? He allows 'em to roam about in the village—though, with all respect to him, I don't think he ought to do it. Anyway mother seed the pig come in and did nought. Then, if you please, the beastly animal walks into the kitchen! And my mother seed him go in and still did nought. Now I do say that was carrying caution too far—what do you think?"

"I suppose she expected to see your wife drive it out every moment."

"No doubt she may have done. But still the time passed and that pig was in the kitchen for more'n ten minutes before Jill comed back. Then mother, seeing my wife, went to her door—they hadn't made it up, you see—and just said, rather stiff like, 'there's one of Mr. Toop's pigs in your kitchen—been there this longful time!' And I'm afraid that Jill lost her temper and used some crooked words there and then; and when I comed back in the evening, she used a good few more."

Samuel sighed and drank another half-pint of cider.

"I hope 'tis all made up and forgotten now," said Ruth.

"Not at all," he answered. "I went over to mother

when I'd heard about it and I said, as gentle as a lamb, that I thought 'twas carrying her great caution and love of minding her own business too far. I praised her for it, mind you; but all the same I was pretty firm—as firm as a man can be with such a good mother. I give her Jill's description of the kitchen when she comed in, and I ventured just to hint, in the kindest possible words, that I thought it might have been better if dear mother had up and gived the alarm, if no more. However, I'm sorry to say that she didn't agree with me and blamed me harshly and fell into tears. To think that I should ever have brought tears to my mother's eyes! She said that I was against her, and that she always knowed it would come to that with such a jealous creature as Jill; and a good many other painful things, quite without truth in 'em, I'm sure. She forgived me in the long run, but not much before midnight; and when I went home, dog-tired, Jill had gone to bed, and I woke her accidental dropping off my boots; and then I got dressed down again. In fact, life has its drawbacks."

Ruth Rendle expressed sympathy and was rather glad when the conversation changed. There entered the bar Moleskin, cheerful and thirsty. He shook hands with Ruth according to his custom, ordered his drink, and saluted Samuel.

"Don't often see you in here in work hours," he exclaimed, and Mr. Bolt admitted that it was so.

"As a matter of fact, I'm taking a day off," he said. "The steam-roller's broken down through no fault of mine, and till they've mended it, there's really not much for me to do. Sometimes, in reckless moments, I almost feel as if I should like a change of work. Almost tired of road-mending with a steam-roller after fifteen years of it."

"'Tis the dulness of doing the same thing over and over again," declared Moleskin. "I've just throwed up

my own job at Sampford Spiney for the very same reason. No backsliding, thank the Lord; I find myself steady as a rock in righteousness, and the pleasantest part of my week is when me and my darter stand in the House of Prayer. But I couldn't shift muck forever, and since Farmer Ash didn't seem to have nothing else for me to do, I just up and left him. But something will come to hand soon without a doubt. Have a drop along with me, Samuel!"

"If I must, I must," answered Mr. Bolt. "All the same, I've had enough cider for the present."

"Give him beer," directed Moleskin. "Beer's a very good top for cider. Never seed such poor promise of apples as there is this year, all through the in country. Orchards full of little old scrubby stuff not worth gathering."

"'Tis a thunder planet reigning," repeated Samuel. "Everything be going wrong of late—and especially with me, for some reason I don't know."

"You don't drink enough," answered Moleskin. "'Tis a great mistake. Look at me. I find I don't take a thimbleful less than in the old days. The only difference is that I pay money down for it."

"You haven't for some time though, Mr. Cawker," ventured Ruth. "If you'd like to see the score——"

"No occasion, no occasion, my dear. I'm quite willing to take your honest word for it. Have no fear. I shall get some new work in a day or two. And, meantime, you see parson stands in the place of God to the likes of me. And if the Almighty looks after the sparrows, so much the more is it parson's duty to look after me. We're all fellow-men and it is the call of the clever and rich to help the humble and meek; and 'tis the business of the poor to pray for the welfare of them in authority—from the King downwards; which I do. In my later wisdom, I see very clearly that we can't do much for the upper classes

except pray for 'em as long as they last. And I pray for them, and everybody, and always shall do."

"And for women labouring with child," said Samuel; "don't forget that, Mr. Cawker. I'm sure last litany Sunday when we comed to it, I felt as if every eye was on me."

Moleskin laughed tolerantly.

"Poor soul! Give him another half-pint, Ruth."

"Not another drop," murmured Samuel; but Moleskin insisted.

"You can carry it; you want uplifting. You're more of a man than you think yourself, I dare say."

"I may be; but I'm easily daunted," confessed the other. "Some days I feel my foot goes down as firm as I could wish, and I look people in the eyes as brave as you would. But other times 'tis borne in upon me that I haven't got more sense than, please God, I should have."

"Be hopeful, be hopeful. It takes all sorts to build a world; and when the battle's over you'll make so good a meal for worms as the best among us," declared Moleskin.

"I may, or I may not, though I know you speak it kindly; and now the beer's in my head! Yes, 'tis there: I feel it mounting! I wish I hadn't took that last drop."

"You'll soon master it," answered Moleskin. "As to beer, when a man's took a good tankard or two of cider first, beer goes down on top, you might say, like——"

The simile was lost, for somebody rode to the door at a gallop, pulled up, dismounted, and hastened into the bar.

It was Northmore, and he addressed Bolt.

"What are you doing here boozing?" he asked. "I was passing your house a bit ago and your mother screamed out to me to go for help. Your wife is ill, and I've ridden for the doctor and the nurse. You'd better go, I should think—else people will say you're rather a callous brute to be here soaking at such a time."

Samuel stared, staggered, then broke into a strange,

excitable cackle, like a hen that has laid an egg and steps out into the light to let the world know it.

"There—there—well might I say a thunder planet was over us! I laugh, but God forgive me for it. To be a sober man from my youth and then—this minute—my child comes into the world to find its father can't stand straight!"

"Take my arm," said Moleskin. "I'll lead you up the hill. Put your head under the pump when you get back, and you'll soon be ripe for twins or any other black news. Pull your face steady, there's a good soul. It ban't no use crying and 'tis a thought too soon to laugh. Come along at once, and just put all your mind into trying to look as if you wasn't drunk."

As he went out, Moleskin turned and winked at Northmore.

"Try to be charitable, farmer," he said. "None of us be faultless—not even this poor reed as can be shaken with a pint!"

CHAPTER XX

THE DEVOUT LOVER

THE day was Sunday and drowsy peace held Merivale after the hour of midday dinner. A few sleepy dogs blinked at the oppressive heat; a few fowls pecked here and there or scratched pits from the dust and sat in them. There was a drone of a harmonium from one cottage, the squeak of a flute from another, but no visible sign of life. Thunder clouds hung heavy over the central Moor; Walla shrunk to her summer tenuity, threaded the vale, and not until the eye reached the village bridge did there appear any human being. Here, however, a few men were congregated. They wore their Sunday black, smoked their pipes, and permitted the processes of digestion to prosper. Nobody said much, but their eyes turned up the valley into the darkness of the gathering storm. As yet its approach was not perceptible. It hung in a curtain of gloom low to the north, and the Moor, as far as Great Mis Tor and beyond it, basked in sunshine and shimmered with heat.

Presently a woman left *The Jolly Huntsmen* and approached Merivale bridge.

All the men knew her and all gave her "good-afternoon." One added a caution.

"Keep your eye lifting out along, Miss Rendle," said Rupert Johnson of Vixen Tor Farm; "there's a storm brewing. Us may miss it; but I reckon 'tis coming. It do force itself up against the wind by reason of the electricity in it."

Ruth thanked the man and went her way to Princetown. She taught in the Sunday School there, and the little event was now grown to be the happiest in her week.

As yet she remained with her kinsmen. Indeed, they refused to let her depart, and finally she had promised to stop another six months with them. Nevertheless she desired to go, for life thus lived brought daily anxieties and daily heart-shaking hidden from all. Northmore's long, unhappy face haunted her, and she could not see Ives Pomeroy without suffering the sweet and bitter sickness of her own secret love for him. She felt that life was making her old before her time. No day passed without one or both of the two great disquieting forces intruding upon her, for Matthew Northmore usually called on his way to or from his home, and Ives often came also to hear his own voice and spend the hour before closing time at the inn. The latter was always a steady beer-drinker; the former, once a teetotaler, now drank spirits. His own share remained trifling, but the farmer developed an unexpected generosity, and the brothers Toop, as became good men of business, changed their attitude towards him and now regarded him as a worthy pillar of the public house.

Northmore's moral character was a little deteriorated under the strain of futile love. He fought to conquer it and failed. He could not drag himself away; he hoped when first he heard it that Ruth would go further off; then there came a sleepless fear and frenzy that she might actually do so. Finally he implored her to remain and wearied her ears with entreaties to stay. Sorely tried, Ruth sought Avisa, told the mother half her story, and heard her counsel departure. Yet Ruth did not depart. She blushed at herself for stopping and scorned the feeble delusion with which she strove to calm her conscience. Then she rose above metaphysics and told her heart boldly that she stopped because she dearly loved a man. At night in darkness, she could whisper this fact to herself and view it unflinchingly, even with joy; but by daylight she dared not look upon it.

Meantime she stopped, and Avisa Pomeroy, whose advice had risen from a disinterested desire to help the girl's happiness, privately rejoiced. It was Mrs. Pomeroy's earnest hope and secret prayer that this staid and steadfast woman might presently waken love in her son. She knew that the roaming and inflammable nature of Ives would take long in settling down; she understood that having failed dismally in his first romance, he might remain a bachelor until well advanced in manhood; but there was that in him of late that filled her hidden spirit with hope. She began to see a little more of herself in him. She feared that a too sanguine soul deceived her, and put cautious questions to her mother-in-law, to Lizzie, to Arthur Brown, and to others. Some made the answers that she wished to hear, and some did not. Her patience was ceaseless, her tact might have appeared extraordinary to any observer who knew not that tact springs from love and sympathy rather than education, and that often the intellectual most lack it. Avisa handled Ives with exquisite delicacy, bred from her own great heart. Sometimes the wonder of his mother was dimly glimpsed by him; at any rate a dawn of wider reasoning and self-control, that now made itself manifest in him, took him often to her. No project of his many projects rose but he submitted it to her. Sometimes she supported, sometimes she restrained, sometimes he proceeded against her advice, and when on one occasion he did so successfully, she hastened to point out that he was right, and that she had been mistaken. The admission woke a fierce, chivalrous love in him. His nature was such that any concession from another made him grateful rather than proud. To him the hatefulness of admitting error was extreme; but all the more did he admire other people who could fearlessly confess that they had done wrong.

The oak coppice was not cut in young Pomeroy's twenty-fifth year, because Mr. Codd, who admittedly understood

oak-rinding and everything to do with it better than any man on Walla side, strongly advised postponement.

"'Tis all against my own interests," he said sourly. "I'm very anxious to drop work and take my pension—which I suppose I may presume to mention after nearly a half-century of toil—but I shan't go till the coppice comes down, and I shan't advise you to throw it till another year's gone over it."

Mrs. Pomeroy obeyed and Ives, who enjoyed all details of forest work, gave his services freely to other men with young oaks to fell.

Now spring was gone and late summer had returned. The coming autumn was to see Lizzie married, and, for the rest, life moved with regularity at Vixen Tor. Mrs. Pomeroy's health had gradually ceased to be the only topic there. She was now considered to be quite well, and she declared herself so when the subject arose. She knew more concerning herself, however, than either Ives or Lizzie learned; and she watched her body with utmost care—for their sakes as well as for her own.

Much did she desire that some flicker of regard might waken in Ives towards Ruth Rendle; but it did not. There came rumours from various sources that linked now this maiden with his name, and now that. But Avisa was accustomed to these things, and so long as Ives spoke openly about his friends, she took little note of them. One woman, indeed, was often on his lips, and he did not weary of her; but Mrs. Pomeroy had done far more for Jill Bolt than anybody knew save Jill herself; and his mother paid little attention to the indignation that Ives constantly expressed concerning his old sweetheart's forlorn state, or the need for helping her against her husband and her husband's mother. His interest and keen jealousy for Jill Mrs. Pomeroy did not applaud, and always treated as lightly as tact would permit. But the subject persisted in the mind of Ives, and he professed a frank regard for

the younger Mrs. Bolt that openly angered Lizzie by its impropriety.

Now Ruth went on her way to Princetown and there came a horseman in the opposite direction. It was Northmore, and glad of the loneliness about their meeting place, he stopped, alighted, and greeted her in his usual yearning fashion. She took her hand from his and blamed him.

"You wasn't at church this morning."

"No; I've had something pulling the other way lately. But I'll be there to-night."

"I'm stopping at Princetown till after supper," she said, and he scented a hope.

"May I bring my trap and drive you home? Please let me do that. It's a little thing enough."

He remembered a past occasion when she had let him drive her into Tavistock and when, half way along the road, an insane desire had burned in him to set his horse galloping across the Moor that their necks might be broken together.

Ruth refused him now.

"'Tis kind to think of it; but I'm not fond of driving and I'd much rather walk."

"May I come to see you home, if the weather turns nasty? So like as not that storm dogging the hills will burst at nightfall—the air's choking full of it."

She sighed.

"If you only knew how unkind it was—if you only knew how your eyes make my heart ache. Why can't you go and look round and find a woman ten thousand times better worth than I am?"

"Find her—where?"

"Anywhere—everywhere. I'm a poor straw driven by any wind—a nervous, frightened creature—a foolish thing. I shall never make no man happy. I don't know how to be happy myself, for that matter."

"I'd show you how to be if you'd let me. A man's

generally strong enough to do one thing, if he pours his whole life and soul and brain into it. And that's what I'd do, and the thing would be to make you happy if you'd let me. By God, I'd fight the whole world and roam the whole world, to find happiness for you! And I would find it."

"A poor task for a strong man. If I'm such a feeble thing that I can't make my own happiness. . . ."

"You're a woman," he answered. "A right woman; and no woman can have real happiness without a man be part of it—not if she's a real, complete female creature. As little as I know, I've found that out. And same with us. The man that's happy without a female, ban't a man —only the puppet of a man. I know what I'm saying. It came late, but it came like raging fire. I rose to my full manhood very slow, as I comed to understanding very slow; but I'd soon make up for lost time if I had the chance."

"The world's full of women, Mr. Northmore."

"Is it? I can't see none. Full of one woman for me, and always will be, and only will be, if I live to a century."

She did not answer and he asked his former question.

"May I come up if the weather turns bad? You can't have the heart to deny me that."

"What's the sense of getting a wet jacket for nought?"

"'Tisn't for nought. 'Tis for the blessed pleasure of holding a shelter above you."

"If—if——" she stammered. Then her mind over-ran itself, she forgot what she was going to say, and stopped.

He took up the word and his voice hardened and he spoke in a mood suddenly turned into savagery.

"If 'twas somebody else—perhaps if 'twas anybody else but me—you wouldn't think twice. 'If—if—if'— you say, and stop, and think I don't know what's in your heart"

"I wasn't meaning anything—only some foolish every-day speech I meant to make. So foolish that I forgot all about it."

"No, you didn't. The thought was so strong that it jumped to your lips and would have leapt out in another moment if you hadn't shut your teeth on it. I know—I know. What don't I know where you're concerned? Everything I know—his name, too, for that matter."

He had not sunk to this until the present. But he believed that Ruth in her broken sentence had thought "If it was Ives Pomeroy." That was Northmore's genuine opinion; and it made him angry and prompted him to this utterance.

She resented it, turned from him with a hard look and went her way swiftly; then, still walking beside his horse, he made haste to overtake her.

"Forgive me. I'm sorry—cruel sorry that I was such a jealous fool. I couldn't help it. I can't help knowing. I——"

She turned and stopped again.

"There's only one thing between us," he said; "and that's a man; and his name is Pomeroy. There! 'Tis out—more shame to me; but you've made me dead to shame. I'd creep through the contempt of the whole world now if I could win you by creeping. Curse the name of the man forever!"

His companion's eyes showed fear.

"Don't, don't speak and think this way. He's nothing to me, Mr. Northmore."

"No, because he's a daft fool, without sense or understanding. But he might be something—he might be everything to you. I know it. I read you like a book, because I love you. How can I help cursing him? Yet not him—only the fact that he's alive. I don't hate him—poor wretch: I only hate your love for him."

"This is cruel!" she cried. "How can you say 'tis

love at all? You're mad to say such things to a maiden that never wronged you, God knows. I don't love him. I don't love anybody. What should I know of loving? You persecute me, and 'tis very wicked of you. My life's sad enough, and if you really loved me you wouldn't make it sadder."

He did not answer immediately.

"You're right," he said. "I'm a thought mad now, and again in your company. But what you say is very true. I must have another fight for it and try to get going from here."

"'Tis the great grief of my life to have made you such an unhappy man. Of course you can't go with your farm and everything; but I can, and I will when my six months are up. Better that way a thousand times. I wish they'd never made me promise to stop now. I was weak."

"It was natural. I can read your heart by knowing my own. If I found it too hard to go, well might you."

"For God's sake, don't say no more of that," she begged. "Ban't comely, or right, or kind—or—or true. 'Twas a cowardly thing, and you know it."

"It was. But I am a coward now. You've broken to pieces what little good of character I had. You can't help it. Anyway, one of us must go, or I'll not answer for myself."

He left her and turned his horse round; then he mounted it and walked forward. For a moment she hesitated; then she called after him, in rather weakly tones:

"You may drive me back, if 'twill be any pleasure to you."

Northmore, however, with a mind deep sunk upon itself, did not hear her, and she, thankful that he had not done so, went upon her way relieved. But her feet dragged and she never reached Princetown after all. Her storm-stricken mind turned against the teaching of children, and presently, as soon as Matthew had descended the

hill and was out of sight, she, too, began to go homeward, and walked very slowly towards Merivale.

She was fearful of the farmer's increased ferocity, and now, retracing their intercourse with leisured mind, she perceived how radically he had changed within the past year. Had love for her, then, dragged him down from his old austerity and severity? Could she thus in all innocence demoralize a man by the mere persistence in a negative attitude towards him? It seemed a very monstrous thing, and, for the first time, a sort of dull resentment awoke in Ruth that her attitude should thus be rendered a reproach, because this man chose to go forlorn and wretched before the world, and suffer her indifference to reduce him in the eyes of the people. She felt it a hard and ungenerous thing; and that Northmore should have named Ives Pomeroy woke active passion in the woman. He must be a mean spirit to have spoken that name to her. For a time she felt anger, then it waned, and she merely mourned when she reflected on the master of Stone Park. His deterioration saddened her and it puzzled her that such things could be. What had he done that Heaven should cloud his life with this unutterable grief? She flattered herself that she very well understood Northmore and, as he could read her heart in the light of his own, so she believed that her secret and hopeless love helped her largely to understand his. Her anger presently waned and she forgave him everything; then her mood changed once more and she blushed under the gathering darkness of the sky, to think that Matthew knew of her love and had actually discovered a thing that she kept hidden even from herself. Again passionate wrath at this circumstance awoke within her and her transient pity for the man was quite smothered before the first thunder drops splashed against the granite beside her way.

All about her road was darkness; above, around, beneath; and it seemed to Ruth that this gloomy descent

amid gathering thunderclouds made a very true picture of her young life's road. But then, against the savage gloom of unshed torrents, and even as the first thunder growled from under the horizon, sudden light burnt along the summits of Great Mis and the tor stood out like a mountain of red gold against the pall of the sky behind it. The setting sunlight had pierced the broken vapours of the west, and for a few moments wrought this wonder upon earth. The immense hill flamed, and every detail seemed to glow through ruddy fire; every track and great stone and solitary, wind-beaten tree appeared stark and shining in that flood of light against the tenebrous sky. Then the moment of transfiguration passed and the mighty hill drew down the darkness of heaven and wrapped itself therein. Lightning already licked its granite bosom as Ruth reached the bridge and felt a moment's feminine thankfulness, despite secret sorrows of spirit, that her modest Sunday finery had escaped the deluge. As she entered *The Jolly Huntsmen* a thunder peal seemed to shake the solid earth and glorious, ragged rifts of lightning rent the sky with fire; streamed from tor to tor; leapt across the rivers; dropped a brand where the Lone Stones struck up blue and wan in the heart of the storm, and slew certain terrified beasts that huddled together there. They tottered, turned up their eyes to heaven, and so fell and died. Walla already began to wake, to rise, and murmur with great rain messages from the midmost Moor. Anon her volume came down and her valleys echoed with huge riot. The river lifted a sound as of the tramplings of myriads that made mighty exodus to the bellow of trumpets and the thunder of drums.

Many watched the storm and during the height of its passage children wept and frightened females hid their faces; but two women there were engaged upon a theme so interesting that neither found mental leisure to fear, even had fear belonged to them. One spoke; the other

listened. The rattle and roar of the sky merely silenced Rachel Bolt for a moment, and as soon as it ceased her thin and ancient pipe, ludicrous in contrast with the organ music of the storm, proceeded again and poured its message upon Avisa Pomeroy's ear.

"If anybody—if angels from heaven—had told me that Samuel would ever say a short word to me, I'd have up and answered they was liars," declared the old woman..

"And you would have been right for certain."

"But it's come—the blow's fallen. Look at my eyes—red—red. Burning tears poured out of 'em last night, and life poured away with them drops. I don't care when I die now. Not only short he was, but sharp, Avisa—sharp with me! He stood there with his tail to the fire and lighted his pipe and looked across at me and said it in cold blood."

"I'll wager he meant nothing."

"What he meant I won't think. 'Tis enough to know what he said—a direct contradiction—as if I was a liar."

"Never—not Samuel. 'Tisn't in him to do it."

"Every word I can call home—every word cut like a knife into my old heart. 'You're wrong, mother—wrong,' he said. Twice, mark you, he used the word 'wrong,' as if once wasn't enough. 'You're wrong. Jill knows perfectly well how to manage the baby!' That's what he said, Avisa—to my face after I'd told him day in day out, since the little girl came, that his wife's killing it."

"Well, surely nothing to make a flurry about, my dear. A man can't always agree with his mother's opinion."

"I don't ask that; but in matters of a baby what right has he to have any opinion? But there, words are no use. He's taken her part. 'Tis time, and more than time, I was underground. I might have known it: the Bible prophesies it. I must wait and watch and see my grandchild done to death by that cruel viper."

"'Tis a very weakly little one," admitted Mrs. Pome-

roy. "You mustn't be very hopeful, I'm afraid. We'll trust to better luck next time."

"It could be reared, if there was anybody to rear it. But I've got to sit here with my old heart breaking and see it die by inches. That wretch hates it, Avisa! No call to shake your head. Do I know best or you? She hates it, like the stupid creature she is, because it's a red un. And whose fault was that? Sammy ban't red anyhow. He's a flaxen man without a red hair on his body. She's dormouse colour, and what more natural than she should have a ginger-haired child?"

"And what more natural than that she shouldn't like it? Us mothers ban't strong in common-sense at such times. But we must be hopeful, and don't you fret about the little thing, whether or no. Doctor sees her every day and if he's satisfied, so did you ought to be."

"If that child dies, 'twill be murder," declared Rachel bitterly. "And old as I am, I'll tear her face for her afore the people, if it happens!"

"Don't you say things like that. The storm's got on your nerves, I think. You'm breathing lightnings and slaughters like the sky. 'Twill fall out as it ought to fall out, whether the baby lives or dies: remember that."

Avisa strove long to comfort her friend, but Mrs. Bolt would not be comforted. Samuel's baby proved to be an extremely feeble and weakly infant, and behind his back the father was blamed for it; but Mrs. Bolt cried shame and blame upon Jill. Meantime the little life hung in the balance. Samuel and his mother prayed Heaven to preserve the atom; and Jill, albeit she spared no proper care and duty, heartily hoped that her puling infant would perish.

CHAPTER XXI

LIZZIE WEDDED

Mr. Arthur Brown displayed a good many little virtues, but above all he prided himself upon a well-regulated mind. When, therefore, his wedding day arrived, it found him calm, and perfectly prepared. His hand did not shake as he shaved himself, and he parted his hair down the middle with neither more nor less care than usual. A fortnight of the honeymoon would be spent at Ilfracombe and a fortnight in London. Lodgings were already engaged and expenses calculated to the last halfpenny. One five-pound note was allowed for possible luxuries. Arthur did not approve of the theatre, but hoped to take his wife to a concert or two. He also designed to enlarge and edify her intellect at many places where instruction and entertainment went hand in hand free of cost. Lizzie had never been to London and the prospect was a delight to her.

She looked a dainty little thing in her white muslin; but she, too, was very staid and showed no emotion under the ordeal. Only her grandmother wept a little in the vestry and Avisa's beautiful eyes shone to see her maiden given into the keeping of a man.

All who cared for the Pomeroys contrived to be present, because this was held an important wedding. Mr. Brown had very few relations or intimates, but a schoolmaster or two attended the ceremony, and his friend, a Harold Wilkinson, a young jeweller from London, acted as best man. The bridegroom did not entirely approve of many among the wedding guests, though he kept his opinions to himself and was reasonably gracious both before and after the ceremony.

It remained for Ives to cast a cloud upon the day; and he chose a moment peculiarly inappropriate to do so. Some had driven and some had walked back from the wedding, and he preferred to return home afoot. With him came Joel Toop and Emanuel Codd.

"Be sure not to mention it," said the publican, "but 'twill be out soon, only I want the wedded pair to get off without hearing the news. They'll toll the bell this evening. Such is life: a wedding peal in the morning and the knell for the corpse afore sunset."

"Who's dead now?" asked Ives.

"A very poor, small morsel of flesh, and a great deliverance, no doubt, for all concerned. Not that they see it so. 'Tis Samuel Bolt's baby, in fact. They found her dead this morning."

"That's a damned good thing," declared Ives. "Anyway Jill will think so."

"And I dare say she knows more about it than she'll tell the coroner," growled Codd.

Ives looked at him dangerously, but the old man missed his glance.

"There'll be a little feeling without a doubt," added Joel. "My brother was up, so soon as he heard about it, to comfort all parties and take the measurements himself —a thing he does for a neighbour in his large-hearted way. And I'm sorry to say that there was high words going. In fact, old Rachel have made herself mighty ill and the doctor, when he comed, was busier with her than with the dead child. Sammy's sitting in a corner crying his eyes out, and Jill's like a statue. She's put on mourning as cool as a cucumber—seemed to have had it ready by the looks of it—but t'others haven't growed calm enough to do such a thing yet."

"I hope 'twill be the beginning of a bit of peace for her," said Ives. "That old hag and her husband and his flute between 'em pretty well worry the flesh off her bones."

"She don't get more than she deserves," answered Codd. "She's a hard case and well everybody knows it; and I hope they'll have the rights of this business."

"Really, you ought to be careful, Codd," replied Joel. "You come dangerously near to libel in the things you let yourself say. Some day you'll fall within reach of the law, and that means money, I can tell you."

"More likely a horsewhip," said Pomeroy. "Old blackguard! The law's too slow to tackle him. He wants a lathering to sting charity into his dirty heart—makes a decent man sick to hear him snarling. If he'd died when he was a beast of a baby, the world would have been that much a pleasanter place. I've told him so often enough, for that matter."

"Pretty talk—on your sister's wedding-day, too! Not even such an event can make you behave like a proper man, Ives Pomeroy. If I'd got any authority——"

"Shut your mouth," cried the other. "You haven't got any and never will have. Keep your nasty thoughts silent; don't spill 'em through your lips, to trouble your betters to-day."

It was in this frame of mind that Ives took his place at the wedding board, and every circumstance of the banquet increased his exasperation. The bridegroom's frigid propriety irritated Ives to madness, though Arthur Brown played his part with a perfection that awoke immense admiration among the company. He smiled on a calculated scale of geniality in proportion to the importance of the guest. He made several pleasant general remarks at the breakfast. These were thought out and intended to be humorous. He helped Lizzie to cut the cake. He called everybody "neighbour" except his best man; but the jeweller, though a lifelong friend, he addressed as "Mr. Wilkinson." Arthur Brown, in fact, suggested a great and good young man unbending among his inferiors. He did not flaunt his superiority, but it was visible in his tol-

erant complacence. This patronage even extended a little to Lizzie herself. He seemed to be at somebody else's wedding. He suggested a youth of better birth and position than his company; one who was here as a compliment to inferior folk. The homelier guests felt a little frightened of him. Only Codd sneered under his breath to Rupert Johnson and Joel Toop, who sat on each side of him.

Ives, with a cloud on his face, ate his meal silently and wished the matter ended. Presently, however, he caught his mother's eye, understood her expression and made an effort to be more urbane. Avisa knew that Jill Bolt's baby was dead, but she hoped that bride and bridegroom might depart in ignorance of the fact. However, that was not to be. Peter Toop, in a moment of professional enthusiasm, spoke an awkward word, and it was overheard by Arthur.

"Ah—taken from the evil to come, doubtless," he said. "In my judgment a man of the somewhat infirm build of Samuel Bolt should not have been permitted to have any hand in the next generation. I have devoted a good deal of thought to the subject, and——"

A cork shot dangerously close to the schoolmaster's ear and silenced him. Ives was opening three bottles of champagne, and whether he had intentionally or accidentally directed the first toward Mr. Brown, he alone knew. Everybody laughed; the bridegroom smiled and dried a few drops of wine that had touched his face. Lizzie's glass was filled, but her husband took none. He shook his head leniently at young Pomeroy, who carried round the champagne.

"Must be true to my principles—even to-day," he said; and Ives, with a short, not pleasant, laugh, turned to his mother and filled her glass.

Meantime the schoolmaster talked to a farmer's wife who sat on his left.

"I haven't signed anything, you know—too liberal-

minded for that, I hope. But as I believe in teetotalism after having considered the question in all its bearings, so I am consistent and practise it myself. I find that consistency seems a great difficulty to many people."

His listener looked at him round-eyed and with an open mouth, but she made no answer.

The champagne allowed a full glass to every member of the company and left a drain for Ives himself. Having poured all out, he returned to his seat, fingered the stem of his glass, and waited for the health of the bride and bridegroom to be proposed. He was not happy and despised everybody about him but his mother.

To Mr. Peter Toop fell the solitary toast of the day; for though the best man from London had prepared a humorous and witty speech on the subject of the bridesmaids, there were none—a fact which secretly disappointed Mr. Wilkinson, though he pretended to be much relieved to find it so.

Peter spoke somewhat heavily and infused a gloom into his reflections ill-suited to the event. His speech was long and never reached its peroration, for Ives created an extremely painful diversion, and the wine that should have been drunk to a sister's happiness was very differently applied. For some time the company listened to Peter's slow and laboured maundering, then people began to whisper among themselves. Mr. Codd was of those who had the bad taste to talk. He addressed Johnson, who sat beside him, and by so doing much annoyed Joel, who said "hush!" somewhat loudly once or twice, and edged away from the labourers. Then it was that Ives overheard a sentiment and instantly exploded.

Emanuel Codd, ghoul-like, appeared incapable of dragging himself away from the dead baby. He had done what he could to asperse Jill from one direction; now he went further and reflected against her from another.

"Bah! The likes of her don't care a rush for law and

order. Perhaps I know and perhaps I don't know who was the father, but it wasn't that slack-twisted toad her husband, mark me!"

This assertion was not designed for any other than his fellow-worker, but, unluckily for Mr. Codd, young Pomeroy heard every syllable, rose, roared, sought a missile, and found his wineglass.

"You vile old wretch!" he cried. "Why haven't the women wrung your skinny neck afore to-day? Why don't these respectable people here kick you out into the gutter where you ought to be? Take that and get you gone, you loathesome beast!"

He flung his wine into Mr. Codd's face, and then leapt from the table. Consternation prevailed. Mrs. Pomeroy rose; Arthur Brown shrugged his shoulders.

"Even to-day!" he murmured reproachfully to Lizzie.

Ives went out without a word; Emanuel Codd drew forth a red handkerchief, spluttered into it, and mopped his face.

"I give notice!" he screamed out. "Mark me, all you people, as have seen me so cruel ill-used by that infernal young youth—I give notice for this day month! I'll endure no more of it, no more of it. And how God A'mighty can suffer that man beats me. 'Tis throwing away good patience to let him go on, and I don't care who hears me say so."

He also left the table, and at the door turned and lifted his voice again.

"He'll strike in His holy time, be sure of that. And I hope that I shan't drop afore right's done, for I shouldn't rest easy in my grave to think that Ives Pomeroy was still trampling the earth after I was under it. And I hope I'll be the Lord's tool to smite him!"

"Go away and hide yourself!" said Joel Toop sternly. "You're a bad old man, and I heard what you were saying myself, and you got no more than you deserved. And

as to your being the Lord's tool, 'twill be a long time afore He wants such a horrid creature for any work of His. Get on, Peter."

But the undertaker had lost the thread of his discourse and made no effort to find it.

"I command all present to drink to these here dear people," he said. "Good luck and long life and prosperity to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Brown!"

Lizzie kept her tears out of sight and soon retired to make ready for her journey. Mr. Codd went to his room, doffed his festive attire, put his wine-wet coat in the window of his attic to dry, and having returned to his corduroys, went out to work. He chose a spot for his labours immediately in front of the parlour window and toiled ostentatiously there, to show that for him the day's rejoicing and merrymaking were at an end.

Ives meantime waited for his sister, and went up to her room with her.

"I owe you a word, Lizzie," he said soberly, "and cruel sorry I am to have made a fuss on such a day of all days; but I couldn't help it; and if you knew what that hatch-mouthed old villain was whispering, you'd forgive me. For him to dare to take away a sad, sorrowful woman's character at such a time! I'll tell you what he said some day, but not to-day. Anyway, God knows that I wish you all the good and happiness and joy and luck and love that a brother can wish a little sister. Arthur's a rare, sensible chap, and I know he'll make you a steadfast, steady husband, and you've a right to be proud of such a man, I'm sure."

She shed a few tears and put her arms round him, while he caressed her, kissed her, and patted her cheek tenderly.

"You'm a dinky dear," he said, "and you bore yourself terrible brave, and—here's mother. I knowed she'd soon be up. I'm telling Lizzie how 'twas, mother. So long

as you and she do understand, I care not a rush for t'others."

Mrs. Pomeroy, thankful for small mercies, felt glad to find Ives with his sister, and when he had left them, Lizzie explained that he had received some very dreadful provocation. The mother doubted it not and felt no particular grief over the incident. Indeed, her passing cloud of anxiety was quite dissolved when she found her boy and girl together. His attack on Mr. Codd and his subsequent speech with his sister both sprang from a love of what was good. So Mrs. Pomeroy believed; and when her son subsequently told her the truth concerning the head man's imaginings, she blamed him no more.

By the time that Lizzie and her husband were ready to start, Ives, at a sudden whim, had climbed the Vixen; and he shouted his farewell from that lofty altitude. Then he disappeared and did not return home until long after midnight, to find his mother still up and waiting for him.

He was vexed at this and wished her in bed.

"You take no heed for your health," he said; "and the doctor told above all things that you was to keep an easy mind and a lazy body. You will be doing too much, and now Lizzie's gone you'll work harder than ever."

"Don't fear that. Time will show that I'm hale and hearty again, I do hope. And I've got a great thought about it to put before you, Ives. However, that can wait a while. I talked to Codd to-night and I think he's a bit ashamed of himself, though he sticks to it that he'll go this day month."

"Then mind he does. Don't yield to him again. Drive him out. I'll not answer for myself if I catch any more of his filthy speeches. Lucky for him I didn't hear him on the edge of the horse-pond, for he'd have been in head over ears if I had—a low-minded dog that he is."

"It won't hurt her, however."

"No, because no sane man ever listens to such a woman-

hater. I saw Jill this afternoon up the valley. We met quite by chance and both on the same errand: to get a little peace from our fellow-creatures. She couldn't pretend she cared much about such a puny, crooked child, for she'm honest enough, whatever else she may be. And I comforted her, I can tell you, mother. And why for not?"

The defiance in his voice nevertheless spoke of an uneasy conscience, and told his mother more than his words. But she did not remonstrate.

"Why for not, indeed? I went up myself to see Rachel after the people had all gone home. 'Tis a very heart-breaking business and this little death even falls sadder than 'twas bound to fall, because of so much cruel misunderstanding. Rachel was drowned in tears, but her old eyes flashed anger through them; and Samuel—he's distracted between his wife and his mother, poor soul. The only peaceful thing in the house be the li'l dead girl. Death have quite smoothed out her puckered face. It took me back long years, laddie, and I felt as if I was by our Milly, when she died."

"I'm sure that Milly was a long sight prettier, dead or alive, than that poor slip," said Ives. "'Twas a damned cruel thing for Jill to have to waste her time bringing trash into the world; and she's glad it be dead and will soon be gone and forgotten; and I consoled her a good deal by telling her that I was glad, too. Brown don't talk much sense in my hearing, but what he said on that subject at dinner was true for once."

"Time will calm them down. I advised Samuel to take Jill away for a week or two at any cost presently. If them women—old and young—could only be separated and kept out of one another's eyes a while, 'twould be a blessing for both."

"The old one's in fault, all the same," said Ives.

"She is—largely," admitted his mother. "I grant that."

Ives continued to discuss Jill and her trials and diffi-

culties. She had entirely won him round to her side, and Avisa felt somewhat concerned to note his deep and close interest. It silenced her upon the great subject which she had mentioned and had hoped to speak upon that night. This related to Ruth Rendle; but after Ives had been home for two minutes, his mother perceived that the moment was not ripe for mention of anybody but Jill. Therefore she said nothing, but listened patiently to her son, and sympathized with his concern.

When he slept, however, she lay waking, and saw dangers ahead that as yet Ives neither discovered nor suspected. In this connexion Avisa did not fear her son, but feared for him; because Jill was a curious, fascinating woman, and soon she promised to be a desperate one. That day, made reckless by anger and grief, Rachel had permitted herself to say many things to her friend. The misery of Samuel's home apparently approached a climax, and old Mrs. Bolt openly declared that she expected Jill to run away. She added that the sooner her son's wife took this definite step, the better Samuel and herself would be pleased; but Samuel did not hear the sentiment, or he might have ventured to modify it.

CHAPTER XXII

CALL OF THE BLOOD

THERE dawned a misty morning, with a gentle west wind and a grey sky that broke away to blue as the sun ascended. Towards noon the clouds dissolved, but something impalpable remained, hung like a glory over the deep, budding woods, warmed the meadows with light and brooded upon the wakening expanses of the Moor. This mellow veil was neither mist nor cloud, but air made visible: the pearly, transparent vesture of young spring. It spread upon the face of the whole earth, added brilliance to the emerald and amber of the forest, lustre to the stone and gentleness to the jade austerities of those desolate earth planes that swept enormous upward from the valleys to the hills.

Over against his home on the eastern bank of Walla, Ives Pomeroy sat on a mossy boulder beside a woman. They talked earnestly; and their feet were buried in flowers. Opposite them the Vixen towered above Pomeroy's farm, where it gleamed with newly whitewashed walls. Beneath was the river and her hanging woods; while at hand stretched those oaken coppices whose time had come and who now shook forth their last splendour of golden green. Already saw and axe gnawed and struck where the harvest of oak began to fall. Above this scene of activity the waste sloped toward King Tor and the spring gorse arose in sheaves and masses of gold from a bluebell sea. The warm odour of the furze was intoxicating in its strength; and above the brightness of its flame there ascended silver birches, that trembled with infant leaves; there sprang stiff, glittering hollies, islanded in the flower light that swept the hill. But the first glory of the place and the hour was a magic of wild wood hyacinths that spread

their azure in one far-flung, fragrant coverlet over glen and dingle. Through their sweet legions the lady fern thrust upward; the male fern broke his silver-russet knobs of fronds; the brake uncurled and fretted the flowers with little shepherds' crooks of pearl. Sap raced and mantled, ebbed and flowed along this scented sea. Examined closely, something of the secret of this blue wonder woven so radiantly by wood and heath might be perceived. Each nodding perianth tube of all these many millions, now rising like an image of heaven from the breast of earth, revealed two tints, and each segment of every blossom showed a strong vein of purest turquoise, broad at the base and running to a point, imposed upon the paler violet texture of the petal. Those blended colours flowed together, made the purple of the flower-masses and closely copied the splendour of the heaven above them; while another subtle marvel that set tuned hearts aching at its beauty was the simultaneous and pervasive curve of unnumbered little stems that nodded under their bells and answered each kiss of the air with a pale flash of light, where they bent together at the stroke of the breeze and together sprang upward again when it passed by. To the edge of the granite boulders and gorse clumps they rolled in waves, like a shallow sea, and the wind blew scent for spray from their lifting ripples; while instead of foam, the stitchworts scattered their galaxies through the blue.

Everywhere was impersonal, abstracted loveliness apart from and independent of all human imagining or human plan. The secret of the day was told in a pageant of life and bird music, in the flash of wings, the uncurling of leaves, the colour of the first flowers. Life seemed to make the earth pulse under foot, to renew the youth of matter and throb into the heart of every ancient stone, even as it ran and rioted along sappy, newborn tendrils or laughed aloud in setting seeds and mating creatures. From the honey-coloured hazes over the forest, to the first violet in

the marsh; from the tiny earthquake, where a mole broke soil, to the cuckoo's unimpassioned monotony, the hour was rife and pregnant and precious: an hour when youth clove to youth, burnt for youth, and learned from youth to conquer and to love.

But, though man seemed not remembered in this vernal pomp and dayspring of another year's fruition, yet he had set his own mark very sternly upon the season, and where oak rinding began, havoc of steel gaped in cruel wounds on the gentle bosom of May. Rank upon rank the regiments of the sapling oaks lay thrown; and those still standing shone all wan and naked, stripped of their bark as high as a man might tear it from them. The ghostly fallen made a dazzle of raw white under the sunshine, and the skeletons above them waited to fall. Now flung open to the sky, the coppice showed itself as a steep hillside of moss-clad boulders and countless shorn boles. A scatter of chips from the axe spread red and white among the ferns and bluebells; in each clearing rose little stacks of bark and faggots of small wood; while the poles were being gradually trimmed and cast into piles for removal. Along the limits of the Pomeroy copses there arose others, whose destruction was reserved for future years, and yet others again, that had recently fallen and whereon nature was now working to repair the past havoc. Some stretched joyous and full of life along the boundaries of the fallen trees. Here the oaks stood, young, silvery, shoulder to shoulder, and from their ranks peeped the hawthorn making ready, sprang the rowan in flower, and climbed the honeysuckles, hanging out their quiet harmonies of leaves, blue-green against the more brilliant foliage of their neighbours. The sun shone impartially into the prosperous glades, upon their stricken neighbours, and over those tracts shorn in a recent year and where now began the task of building up another coppice for the axes of men unborn to fell. In the theatre where these hidden souls would

labour, time made ready. No unsightly stump showed here; instead the bluebells clustered close and from their midst each deeply rooted bole already lifted twigs covered with lush, carmine-tinctured leaves. These branchlets in their turn would bear the hillsides' music-making canopies of green; would contribute to the earth's beauty for many years; would fulfil destiny, when a quarter-century was past, and fall to the ceaseless need of man.

Ives sat beside Jill Bolt. They met by appointment without secrecy; and within sight of them where they sat, Rupert Johnson, Emanuel Codd and several others were working.

She retraced recent events, for they had not spoken together of late days.

"After Christmas the old woman 'peared to grow a bit more friendly. Samuel was ill then, you remember, and off work for nearly six weeks. She wanted him to go in the hospital, for she mistrusts me and thinks I can't look after him; but he wouldn't go and he's pretty right again now. A dog's life; I suppose 'twill be better when his mother dies."

She looked straight before her, and he fixed his gaze on her profile—her strange face and heavy eyes; her hair, like a wild fire of wind-blown flame; her round, deep bosom. She had grown thinner of late, he thought, but she was none the worse for it. He carried an ash sapling in his hand and, after patting the ground idly with it, patted her shoes. She did not heed him.

"How's your husband's uncle now?" asked Ives.

"Nearly all right, I believe. 'Twas a scare about nought seemingly."

"You were married under false pretences then, Jill."

She smiled.

"Not that—only a cruel, bad bargain. My race be a very unlucky one: nothing ever falls out well with us. The only good thing that's happened to me since I married

was making your mother my friend. She understands pretty near all I've got to suffer—nobody else does."

"I'm very sure I do."

"You understand all that a man can—I grant that. Oh, Ives, you don't know how I love you for being so large-minded; but there's a lot of things no man could understand, and that your mother does. A very wonderful creature. I hope to God she's growing stronger and no sign of any more trouble."

His face grew gloomy.

"As for that, she makes light of it, but I don't. She's going into Tavistock again next week—for my satisfaction, though she vows that all be very well. I see her hand go up sometimes, when she thinks none be looking, and I feel the stab of the pain as if 'twas in my own breast."

"I'd lay down my life for that woman," said Jill; "and so would you, if I know you."

He nodded and was silent. Then his voice changed a little and she marked an echo of the old, masterful intonation when he courted her. But it shook a trifle, too, as though he was not quite certain of himself.

"Look at me, Jill," he commanded; and she obeyed instantly.

Her pale eyes, under the droop of the upper lid, fixed themselves on his dark ones. She did not look horizontally into his face, but obliquely and sidelong. The glance was gentle, humble, and trusting.

"You said you loved me just now."

"Well, and I do. I'm not ashamed of truth—never was. Is it a sin? I always loved you—always save in those few black days when we were fools, the pair of us, and I left you. But don't think no more of it. What's done be done."

"'Tis a brave man's part to undo what's done sometimes," he said.

She laughed and put out her hand for him to hold. It

was a simple little gesture often performed in the past—like the unconscious action of a child. He used to love her to do it then. Now he held it and looked round. There was nobody in sight, though shouts and the cracking of wood echoed close by. He held her hand and pressed it as he used to. She drew it away.

"Whatever be I thinking of?" she said.

"Thinking of two years agone," he answered. "And so be I. You've not changed much, for all your trouble."

"I'm thinner far."

"So pretty as ever anyway."

"You are a wonnerful, generous, rare chap," she said.

"Give me a kiss, then," he faltered, not looking at her. "Your good's my good. I never seed anybody that I never got tired of but you. I'd go to the world's end for you this minute, Jill."

"No more kisses, Ives."

"One—on that little mole on your cheek. Please, Jill!"

A light twinkled across the valley. A spot of white fluttered up and down in the garden, and the man marked it.

"Dinner," he said; "that's my mother waving her apern. 'Tis the signal dinner's ready. Just one, Jill. Where's the harm of that? Who's the worse? I'm panting all over for it!"

"Tis springtime in your blood, not me. Any other would make you just as hungry."

"No, by God!"

"I won't let you kiss me, Ives, because I don't think 'tis a seemly thing; but I'll come and eat a bit of dinner along with your mother and you, if you like. No call for me to be home till tea time."

He was delighted and made up his mind to touch her face with his lips before the day was done.

"That's very good news," he said. "And mother will be pleased, I know, for she thinks a lot of your good sense and pluck. You go straight down the path and I'll follow

you. I begin to work myself to-morrow. I can strip three of these poles while other chaps be stripping one."

"Of course you can."

"Stop at the river. Don't cross without me. There's a lot of water going down and the stepping-stones be half hidden."

"Very well, so I will."

She went her way and Ives turned to the men.

To see the bark being stripped from the living trees had struck an imaginative stranger as horrible: an inflection of some appalling torture upon quick, sentient beings. The integument shredded away in great flakes torn with strong hands; and a sharp odour of sap infused the air. The perishing coppice exuded a death-scent, and the naked poles stood stark and shining in their colourless life's blood as the skin was ripped in dull silver flakes from every limb.

Emanuel Codd piled the bark. For the third time he now saw Vixen Tor farm coppices cut down; but he could not live to witness the operation repeated; and if this reflection made him feel patriarchal, it also rendered him morose. He had quite determined to give warning and retire during the following autumn.

Through the tree stems, himself unseen, Mr. Codd had watched his master touch the hand of Jill. He sniffed to himself and imagined evil. Now Ives approached him, and the old man, labouring along under an armful of oak bark, stopped and waited for young Pomeroy to speak. Emanuel, with his brown, gnarled face and thin mouth, with his load and the strong smell of the bark exuding from his person, stood there a very incarnation of the astringent, tannic, tonic principle.

Ives dimly recognized this.

"They ought to cart you away with the other stuff," he said, laughing shortly. "You'd tan hides as well as oak can."

"Truth generally tastes bitter in a bad world," answered Codd. "'Tis the business of men that don't like us to tell it. And I don't like you, and I'll always tell it. Not that truth will ever tan you into anything useful."

"'Tis just for that I like you to stop here," answered Pomeroy. "If we want to see a chap in deadly earnest, we must look at our enemies. There's no friendship takes the trouble that a red-hot hate does."

"I'll take this trouble, anyhow, hate or no hate," answered the old man. "For your mother's sake I'll always speak up and scorn anything you may do or say that's wrong. You mind this: don't you be loafing about stray corners in springtime with your neighbour's wife! Cuss till you're black in the face: that's good advice, and for once in a way there's no hate behind it."

He threw his load down, then began to pile the bark upon a grey and glowing stack.

Ives did not curse but laughed.

"I might have known you was squinting at us! You scent evil, like a carrion crow scents a dead pony. Don't you fear, my old blid. I shan't do nothing to shock your nasty mind."

He was none the less glad that Mrs. Bolt had refused his petition.

"Another thing," said Emanuel. "'Tis all one to you, no doubt, whether a man works or idles; but Cawker, as be down on the south edge of the copse-wood, might just as well go home for all he's doing. As my duty was, I went across this morning and surprised him sitting by the river smoking his pipe and watching a wood-dove's nest over his head. I only tell you this because I believe he's getting four shilling a day for his job. Nothing to me, of course. All the same, since he took to sneaking up parson's sleeve, that man's grown to be the idlest old dog on Dartmoor. Lazy ban't the word for him."

"I'm going back that way," answered Ives. "Thank you for so much information, Emanuel. You speak out of kindness for my mother. I very well understand. But there'll never be no love lost between you and me, I reckon."

"I reckon not. However, I'll soon be gone now, and you can get a head man as will suit you better."

"Nothing easier," answered Ives; then he went his way.

The edge of the wood where Moleskin was supposed to be earning honest money, extended but little out of the farmer's road as he passed down hill to the river. He made the necessary detour, therefore, and, on sighting Mr. Cawker, crept forward very carefully and stalked him.

But the converted poacher knew exceedingly well what it was to be stalked. He saw Ives coming before the latter saw him. Nevertheless Moleskin, who as a matter of fact was not working, made no effort to do so. He lolled on a scented cushion of wild thyme and his eyes peered into the valley beneath. Blue smoke puffed from his pipe, and his dinner in a little frail stood beside him. He appeared the picture of elderly, orderly content and peace.

"Morning, Ives. I heard 'e coming! You see, I know who 'tis without looking round," said the idler, when Ives had reached to within twenty yards of him. Then Moleskin rose and beamed and stretched his arms.

"A gladsome day," he said. "'Tis good to be alive and know you'm a righteous creature doing man's appointed work on such a day."

"Drop that rot," said Pomeroy. "With me, anyway, you needn't pretend anything. Why ban't you working?"

Mr. Cawker winked slowly.

"Force of habit," he said. "And not rot by no means. 'Tis good to be alive, even at the withering time of life where I begin to find myself. Yet there's a sort of second

sap begins running in us old men, if we've led a healthy open-air life like what I have. And when I say I'm a 'righteous creature' now, I mean it."

"Why ain't you working then?"

Mr. Cawker shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't think 'tis the young man I like best on Dartmoor axes me that question," he answered. "For that matter, you might have found me hard at it if I'd lowered myself to deceive you, because I marked you coming long before you saw me. I know your way of going through a wood very well indeed—straight ahead; and the branch that can bend, you bend, and the branch that won't bend, you break. I knowed 'twas you, but I scorned to pretend anything. 'Tis a day to glory at and feast upon and snuff up, like a sweet smell, and drink in, like a drop of spirits. We know one another very well, thank God; and you've taught me a lot; and among other things that there be times when 'tis only a mean spirit will work. The world calls to pray and to play this morning. For that matter praying and playing be often one thing."

"And four shillings be four shillings," answered Ives. Then he took a seat and filled a pipe, with his thoughts running upon the woman by the river.

"Four bob is four bob, and nobody can deny it," admitted Moleskin. "Yet four bob a day to a man of my parts be very small money. Not that I grumble, because righteousness is its own reward, as I tell my wife when she says it must end in the workhouse afore next winter. 'Let it,' I answer. 'There was a time when you longed to go there and said openly to me that the infirmary would be the highest joy you could hope for this side of New Jerusalem. But now, when 'tis very like indeed that we'll all have to go there, through my great and blessed reformation, and my regular church-going, and the terrible difficulty of getting work and so on—now, be blessed if you don't begin to fall shy of the idea and clamour for

more money!' But why need I say these things to you? You know what the dear women be—all of 'em. If they was reasonable and common-sensible, half the pleasure of 'em would be gone. 'Tis the surprises in 'em and the unexpectedness of their minds draws me—a wonderful gamble they be, never so near as when furthest off and never so far off as when in your arms. But—there, you've got the delight of finding out about 'em still. I'd give my knowledge for your ignorance if I could begin all over again—bless their hot, cunning hearts!"

"You're too much for me," said Ives. He felt in his pocket and found half-a-crown. "Give this to Mrs. Cawker with my compliments, and mind you do! No nonsense. If she don't thank me next time she sees me, I shall know you sneaked it."

Moleskin was hurt.

"You can even think such a thing and know me—as I am now! Once you might have said that; but I take it very unkind that you do since I turned over a new leaf."

"Get on with your work and don't waste no more of your time or mine," said Ives.

"Come down to the river then—for luck," answered Mr. Cawker. "I've got a bottle dropped in there—to keep cool against the dinner hour. Thirsty work and rough work, this rinding the oaks. Do you mind the old saying about it: 'Go into oak-ripping dressed and you'll come out ragged; go into it ragged and you'll come out naked'? 'Tis a great strain on my humble clothes, as you see. But that's neither here nor there. Anyway, you must have a drop from my bottle. 'Tis thirsty work doing nothing too—clever at that though you are still. For that matter I always say you'm clever at everything you turn your hand to."

"I start to-morrow," answered Ives. "Then I'll show some of you what rinding means."

"I lay you will; and I hope you'll begin here alongside me, for I'm very wishful to see if you'm such a wonder at it as Rupert Johnson says you are."

They had now reached the river and Moleskin fished up a big white glass bottle full of gin and water. Pomeroy, to oblige him, drank a little. Then they parted and soon the farmer stood again by Jill Bolt, where she waited at the crossing. Thought had sped somewhat swiftly with her during his absence. Her instincts felt a joy in him —in his brown skin, sturdy neck, and curly hair—in his somewhat fierce eyes and the general atmosphere of healthy masculinity that he diffused. It was she who seemed in an oncoming mood now.

"I was afraid you'd forgot me," she said.

"Not likely! I don't forget. There's more water here than I thought."

She laughed.

"Looks as if you'll have to wade a shallow and carry me across."

He fired at the idea.

"Let me—I will!"

"Of course not—I was only laughing. There's no need, really."

"But there is need, and I'm going to do it—and—and——"

He sat down and began to take off his boots. He was in such a hurry that he fumbled a knot. The lace was leather, but in his amorous impatience he exerted sudden strength and broke it. Not until afterwards did he discover that the strain had injured his finger.

"'Tis all nonsense. I can take off my shoes and stockings as well as you, for that matter," she said.

But he did not reply. In a moment more his boots were round his neck and his socks in his pocket. Then he turned his trousers to the knees, flung his stick over the river, and opened his arms.

"Come on," he said. "No good saying 'no.' I be going to carry you over willy-nilly now."

She let him have his will and his arms picked her up and held her close.

"You be lighter than you was."

"Yes, I am; and maybe you're stronger."

He waded out, and his feet felt the sparkling water, and his face felt the woman's hair. In mid-stream he stopped and looked at her, and hugged her.

"Go on, go on," she cried. "This ban't fair."

"All's fair in——"

He kissed her.

"Kiss me back," he said, "or I'll drop you in the river!"

He felt her arms tighten round his neck, and she kissed him fiercely thrice for his once.

"Glory, glory!" he shouted, and his noise frightened a kingfisher that sat twenty yards distant on a dead branch above a pool. There it had perched like an opal on a miser's finger; but now, alarmed, it twinkled down stream and vanished with a cry.

For a long time not another word passed between Jill and Ives. He brought her across, then put on his shoes and socks, then picked up his stick. Presently he spoke again.

"This is the most splendid thing that has happened to me for two years," he said.

"You was always too strong for me, and always will be. I won't trust you no more, Ives."

He did not speak and half way up the hill she burst out impatiently:

"To live all one's life among these old crook-backed men and women and in such a home as mine! I wish to God I was dead and out of it."

Still he did not reply. He was thinking swiftly of all that she meant to him. Old fires began to waken; a thousand old memories arose through the channels of the

five senses, since he had held her so close again and pressed his face against hers.

"I'm going to think about it," he said presently. "There's a remedy for most things where two people be of one mind. Leave it till us meet again. Let me have a week."

"You can't do anything now. But I know you would if you could."

"I can run away with you!"

She laughed.

"That's like your pluck! But where?"

"Not another word till I've had a bit of thought about it," he said again. "I'll go up into the Vixen with my pipe and—this puzzle."

"Better not think about any such folly," she answered. "I'm nothing to fret your mind or waste your thoughts about. I'm only an unhappy sort of woman that's drawn a blank in the world like plenty of my betters."

They appeared at the farm, and Ives explained that Jill had come to eat with them. He went away for a time and left the women together.

"I hope you get stronger," said Jill. "Mrs. Bolt said something about you to Samuel and feared you wasn't so well."

Avisa shook her head.

"Don't think that. I'm going down to Tavistock next week—to please Ives; and I hope that the doctor will say there's no cause to be troubled. Just a passing thing. For that matter, what be life's self but just a passing thing, Jill?"

But her face belied her. It lacked the old full outline. Jane Pomeroy also shook her head.

"'Tis very well to make light of it, Avisa," she said. "But you know that you'm not all you should be."

"Just ups and downs—same as we all have—men or women," answered Avisa. "Don't say nothing before the

boy, mother. It makes him so terrible vexed when a word's spoken. Besides, you must know I'm going to have a useful help here come autumn. Then Ruth Rendle is going to stop for a few months along with us. She've had a hard struggle to get away from the inn; but the Toops know now that she's really going, and they've got used to the idea."

"They'll miss her cruel."

"I'm afraid they will; but for some reasons I'm thinking she'll be happier along with me—just through a winter till I'm spry again."

Jill reflected on this arrangement. She know very little of Ruth, but she wondered what Ives thought of her. He had never mentioned her, therefore she guessed that she did not interest him.

At dinner the talk ran on Lizzie Brown and her husband. They still dwelt at Sampford Spiney; but Arthur had at last achieved promotion and would go to more important work in East Devon after Christmas.

"And a good riddance," said Ives. "The starch in that man would stiffen all the shirts in England. And nought to be starchy about that ever I could see."

"'Tis only his manner. You ought to pity poor Arthur, not blame him," said Avisa. "Think what 'tis to go through the world without ever laughing!"

"Without feeling more like," answered her son. "No more power of feeling than the stone you bark your shin on. For that matter the likes of him be stones for the more warm-hearted sort to bark their shins on. A selfish, cold, proper creature! I'm always bruised after I've been along with the man for five minutes."

"Lizzie's happy—that's the main thing," said Jill. "So long as she understands his nature and he don't hurt her——"

"He don't hurt her, because she haven't got the power of being hurt," answered the man. "A little, unfinished

thing like dear Lizzie—made to be cuddled and fussed over—eh, mother?"

"No, Ives. Lizzie wasn't that sort. She never wanted cuddling—even from me when she was a young one. She's happier without it. He loves her very well and she's perfectly satisfied with what she gets, and can't picture nothing different."

"How a woman can be happy with a man who's got starch in his veins instead of blood——" began Ives. He finished the sentence with an expression of contempt, and his grandmother took him to task.

"You want for everybody to be cut out in your own pattern," she said. "'Tis so narrow and silly, I'm sure. A fiery sort of world and cruel unrestful to live in, if all was like you, my dear."

"'Twould be living anyway," he answered. "I'd sooner smart sometimes, as God knows I have done, than never smart. Because if you can't suffer when you'm miserable, you can't rejoice when you'm happy. Life's a tingling business with me. It rubs against me and it's good or bad —never neither one nor t'other, like with Arthur Brown. The man don't know he *is* alive!"

That night Ives talked along with his mother, bewailed the wrongs of Jill and tried to win some expression of opinion from Avisa. She was cautious and sympathetic. She guessed pretty correctly what had set his blood on fire, and felt no anger at the fact. Her only sorrow and care was that this woman had strength still to waken his hunger, and that it was not another who had done so. She felt uneasy concerning the future; and for the present she felt powerless. The trend of her son's existence was towards betterment, and there she left the matter. His mind steadily enlarged; his views were tinctured by more knowledge and understanding. For the rest he continued his unequal and uncertain way. Upon one glad

occasion, treasured in the mother's heart, young Pomeroy had openly admitted that there was more in Ruth Rendle than at one time he had imagined. She accepted the concession with immense secret satisfaction, but was careful to reveal none of her hidden delight. As for the plan that Ruth should come to Vixen Tor farm presently, Ives made no objection at all. Since Lizzie had left, too much work fell on Avisa, and she would not engage a servant. Therefore her son was glad when Ruth promised to come. He did not guess the girl's secret trepidation or the struggle that she had to decide. Indeed, Mrs. Pomeroy herself knew little of that. But she was very glad that Ruth should stay with them a while, and she felt, so far as her son was concerned, an inevitable intimacy, that must arise from dwelling together, would settle once for all the problem most in her mind. She understood Ives and knew that he would be engaged to this girl in less than six months, or not at all. She felt but little hope, yet continued to believe that of all women in their world, this one was most likely to make her son a happy man. She longed to see him married to Ruth. If once such a step could be brought about, every successive year as his own character ripened, must more deeply impress upon Ives the good fortune of possessing such a wife.

But it was of Jill Bolt and not the maiden that Mrs. Pomeroy thought that night, until sleep closed her day's anxiety.

CHAPTER XXIII

A RELAPSE

Now did the mother's natural fire abate and sickness surely lessen her native energy. She hid all that was possible, and indeed her strength waned so slowly that no eye marked the gradual decline of it.

Upon her second visit to the hospital there came a guarded report. The physician committed himself to no very definite opinion. He held intervention at this juncture not called for, but urged upon the patient to take all possible rest and strive for peace of mind and body.

Many visited Mrs. Pomeroy when she returned home again, for she was a woman well loved, and much given to kindness.

There came certain summer days when circumstances all combined to make Avisa happy, and good followed upon good. Another had feared such prosperous tidings and predicted some rough reverse before that week was done; but she felt no uneasiness and, looking forward, only prayed that her life's hope might come within sight of fulfilment before the end. Her secret desires, indeed, were largely narrowed to Ives at this season and he was seldom out of her mind. Of late, while her health was again the first anxiety at Vixen Tor, Ives had behaved as a very pattern man and son. He thought for her and largely lived for her. Nothing that could cause her anxiety came upon his lips; himself and his affairs he kept out of sight and discussed but shortly, even when she pressed him to do so.

She hoped and tried hard to believe that he had ceased to think of Jill Bolt, and she was able to tell him after

speech with old Rachel Bolt, that Samuel's wife appeared much happier of late.

Then came Peter Toop to see Mrs. Pomeroy and she found that the publican echoed her own hopes.

"A very great improvement, and we all mark it," he declared. "Even Northmore, as can't be called a friend of Ives, has allowed of late in company that your son seems inclined to grow up to man's estate at last. He'll catch up his years very soon, and be as good and steadfast a character as his father before him."

"You couldn't say nothing sweeter than that," she answered. "This is a red letter day for me to hear you tell such things. And I know 'tisn't mere kind-heartedness for me that makes you, Peter. I do think you've hit the truth touching Ives. He works a lot harder and talks far more sensibly than ever he did."

"And he's more civil—a very good thing in a young man. He thinks before he speaks, and so saves himself many a pang afterwards."

"'Tis the best medicine you could bring me to hear you talk so."

Peter expressed pleasure, then proceeded to the matter that had brought him.

"I be come chiefly about Ruth. You'll guess 'tis a very cruel loss to us, and for my part I can't see at all how we'll do without her. I may tell you, Avisa, in the darkest confidence, that I offered her marriage—though I know you didn't advise it. Still, that's a matter a man be often very pigheaded upon. However, she wouldn't have me. She was very ladylike, though I still think mistaken. A woman such as you will be a good shield for her; but, to say it without pride, a man like me would have been still better. A male, among his other gifts, did always ought to know how to stand between the world and his particular female. And that I could have done for Ruth as well as any man I can call to mind. But that's

over. She won't have me. The question is 'Who will she have?' Now you know Matthew Northmore?"

"Very well, poor chap. He was here a bit ago and came, like your good self, to say he felt glad to hear I was going on well."

"But when Ruth arrives I warn you that he'll haunt the place. A mistaken and a desperate man. He's ruined his life largely on her account. He rides hard still and minds his business likewise, but he's fallen away from his old self something terrible."

"She will never take him. She cannot."

"Of course she won't. Why should she? There's no dignity to the poor soul, and I might call your attention to the very different way that I behaved when she refused me. I loved her as well as ever Northmore did; but when she said 'twas out of the question, I just suffered it. Not a thimbleful more than my usual did it tempt me to take. I went on with my life as before—same as a labourer has to do his day's work in bad weather as well as fine. But that man—it turned him from teetotalism to begin with; and that was, of course, to the good—yet there was something weak in it. You talk to him, Avisa Pomeroy. I can't myself, having been as it were in the same fix; and Joel won't, because he says, since Ruth is so short-sighted as to leave us, he doesn't feel no more interest in her. But I do, and I wish very much for her welfare. So, as a beginning, I beg you'll speak in your usual clear-sighted and reasonable way to Northmore, and tell him to give over persecuting her."

"You ask a harder thing than you know," she answered. "I'm interested in Ruth, too—and very, very interested in her future. She's an uncommon woman and, though I look through a mother's eyes, yet I wouldn't do it if it coloured the picture unfairly to her. But 'tis this way. I honestly believe, and more and more every day of my son's life, that he and she would make a most beautiful,

happy couple and be a very good blend. I'm telling you secrets, Peter, but I know you'll keep them."

"You deep woman! Trust a mother! Well, I don't see anything against it, though a year ago I shouldn't have liked it. But Ives be on the upward path, I believe."

"And the wiser he gets, the more he'll see in Ruth."

"I wonder what she thinks of him? But even you don't know that, I suppose. Well, 'tis a harmless state of things, and if they be meant for one another by Heaven above they'll come together. But why should that stop you talking to Matthew Northmore?"

"Because I'm partial. I try not to be, but I must be. Still, if Ruth have made up her mind about him for good and all, perhaps there's no unfairness in my trying to get the poor fellow to see how 'tis."

"Certainly not; and I hope you will do so. I'll go further and say 'tis your duty. Remember, Ruth's that fond of you that, if you held up your finger, she'd jump in the river for you."

"And I'm fond of her—dearly fond. 'Tis more than good of you to let her come to me just while I've so little nature in me; but I hope you'll see her as often as you like, and, if I get a bit stronger presently, then maybe she'll come back again to you—if nothing happens."

Peter laughed.

"Something will happen, however—if you've got your native wits in your head still."

"Don't think I shall do anything. I know 'em both too well . . ." She stopped, then put her hand on his arm and continued in a low voice. "Sometimes I think 'twill be my passing that will do what I want—and only that. And I'd go very happy, Peter, if I saw them with their hands clasped beside my bed."

"Nonsense, nonsense," he said. "That's not like your lofty spirit to talk about death. 'Tis far from you if I'm any judge. I wish I could count on so many years;

for though the spirit bides young, the flesh will be going forward."

He left her soon afterwards and, albeit a man not very swift in reading of human nature, yet marked the change in his friend's outlook upon the world and fancied that he saw a certain unsteadiness of mental view foreign to Avisa in health. He was partly right and partly wrong. A change indeed had come, and Avisa secretly permitted herself a somewhat more sanguine attitude than of old; but the thoughts that she had expressed to Peter sprang from the explicit improvement of Ives, not from the knowledge of her own increasing weakness. Her sight was not dimmed; there was no sentiment in her suspicion that perhaps through her personal sufferings and death the road would lie where Ruth and Ives might meet. A very keen understanding of the young man and woman begot the idea.

She sat alone in the kitchen when Peter departed, and the next guest was Mary Cawker. Rupert Johnson brought her in and explained that she had come to see the mistress.

At Avisa's wish the man stopped, because she knew something about his secret mind that none else knew.

Mary declared the happiness of her family, and of herself, at Mrs. Pomeroy's bettered health.

"Mother, as be a bed-lier these many years and can understand illness as only such dead-alive creatures can, was very wishful to tell you that she felt thankful," said Mary. "And father, too. He says that it may be as much an answer to his prayers as anything, because he says if the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, though an every-day thing in heaven—as common as letters through the post—yet the prayer of such as him might have a lot more to it, because so rare."

"A wonderful reform, and I hope he'll never look back," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "Ives told me you were largely

to be thanked for it, Mary. Well, 'twas a useful and beautiful thing to come into the world for, if you comed for nothing else but to save your father."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," answered Moleskin's daughter; "yet, now and again, I have my doubts how 'twill end. To be plain with you, he's a terrible lazy old man since he found the Lord. Us rejoice, of course, at least, I do. Mother don't and never did from the first. The fact is, there's no money coming in."

"Ives gave your father a lot of work in spring."

"And don't we know it? And wasn't we thankful? There's work waiting for father now, and as much hedge-tacking come autumn as he's got strength to do. But he haven't a mind to it. He's off to church like a lark twice every Sunday, and he takes the bread and wine with the best when the proper days arrive; but work . . ."

She broke off and sighed. Then she continued.

"He's like they varmints, I'm afraid—like they hawks and owls and weasels. Life for him means death for something else. He can't live and let live. He can't help it—built so. You couldn't tell a weasel to stand to work and get his living honest, any more than you could ax one of them dagger-billed birds to give up hunting and live on berries. 'Tis the same with father—his nature droops under the use of common tools, like spade or pick or bill-hook."

"I don't think that is it at all," ventured Johnson; "he gave me quite a different reason anyway. He said that his gorge rose against honest work because it was so shameful badly paid. He thinks that a clever man like him ought to get more, and can't understand why the world at large ban't of the same mind. I told him that vartue was its own reward; but he said that vartue didn't appear to be up to keeping a bed-ridden wife and darter."

Mrs. Pomeroy laughed very heartily, much to the surprise of Mary and Rupert.

"I wish I could see 'twas funny," said the former mournfully.

"I'll talk to Ives," promised Avisa. "Seemingly 'tis a choice with your parent between doing wrong and doing nothing."

"He'll never do nothing. Far too busy-brained a man for that," answered Moleskin's daughter. "But if you could—if anybody could see their way to seventeen and six a week, I do think all might come right. Nobody can honestly say he's not worth it."

"He's well worth it," said Mr. Johnson. "If I can get it, as I can, thanks to Mrs. Pomeroy and Mr. Ives, then your father ought to be good for a sovereign at the least, if not more."

Avisa nodded, and her grey eyes twinkled with the brightness of old.

"You can knock off for a bit and see Mary up the hill, if you like, Rupert," she said.

The young man started guiltily; the hard-faced Mary showed no emotion. But Avisa had seen a dawn of joy even for Mary Cawker. She smiled as they went out together and Rupert uttered his clumsy thanks.

"I'll bide after hours, ma'am. Have no fear as the farm will lose by it."

These things happened on a Wednesday, and during the following day Ives himself rejoiced his mother by his solicitude. He also mystified her. It seemed that he had surprises for her, but he would not utter them until he knew her health was strong enough to stand them. She had long guessed that something was hidden, but as yet knew not what it might be.

The time to tell seemed close, for she could usually rely upon instinct in this matter, and Avisa came with placid mind to the familiar nightly interview. Ives said little by day to her or anybody. It was at those times, when the life of the farm slept, when he returned to his home

after midnight, and when Avisa often came down from her room for a little while to see him eat his supper—at these times he told her things concerning his personal interests, plans, and hopes.

On Saturday night the mother and old Jane Pomeroy sat and talked of the past. It seemed that a climax had been attained of late by each member of the little family, and Jane reviewed the situation.

"I, for one, never should have expected it," she said. "Because you always let him have a freer hand than his father would. My son well knowed what poison boils in a young man's veins, and what worthless things they be most times till it works out of 'em. However, Avisa, all's well, I do believe. He's taking closer and closer after my son."

"Yes, mother."

"They break our bodies," said the old woman, "but that's nothing. 'Tis as much for what they've made us suffer as for anything else, that we love 'em. Nought's so precious as what have cost pain to come by. But when they break our hearts. . . . But I do think the poison's pretty near wore out of the youth. I've heard no girl's name on his lips for a year, and that's very much to the good in my judgment."

"I hope you will, however, before long."

"She'll need to be a clever creature—and a brave one."

"Lizzie's happy as a lark, too. If Ives be so well suited with a partner in his turn, you and me can go happy, my dear."

Jane nodded.

"No need to talk of going, all the same," she said.

"And if he makes as good a husband as he has son——" continued Avisa.

"Let's hope he'll shine better at it—for all sakes. We mothers be too easily satisfied. The wives want a lot more than we do," declared old Mrs. Pomeroy.

"We ought to be satisfied," answered Avisa. "One thing's sure: there are more good sons in the world than bad."

"So there ought to be if religion counts for anything. But all the same, 'tis easier to be a good son than a good husband, in my opinion."

They talked by fits and starts until it was after ten o'clock. Then Jane summed up, as she rose to depart.

"Here be I nearly an hour after my bed-time—all through talking about your blessed boy and girl, and my dear son, your husband. Well, 'tis a beautiful subject, God knows. And Ives have got to get in love with my favourite, Ruth. That's the next thing. Then—then I suppose I'll be a great-grandmother, and you'll be a grandmother, and us'll begin our cares and hopes and ideas all over again for the next generation. Well, so must it be: there's no steady happiness in this world if you love people."

"There's no steady happiness unless you do," said Avisa.

Jane Pomeroy went to bed, and her daughter-in-law prepared a supper for Ives.

Upon her dreams the man presently came and brought red-hot reality with him. He was flushed and evidently excited. He asked a question swiftly, and when his mother answered in the affirmative, his secrets burst out of him in a flood.

"Be you strong enough and brave enough to hear a bit of strange news to-night, mother?" he asked, flinging off his cap and walking up and down restlessly. "Don't say 'yes' if you ban't; but things have got to be done, and quickly. Only I don't want them to come as a shock and surprise upon you. That might be worse than if you didn't know at all."

"I'm quite equal to hearing what you've been hiding so close these many days, dear lad."

"I might have guessed you'd seen a bit of it. What don't you see? And you'll swear afore the living God to tell no creature? You'll swear that, mother?"

She grew a little cold and her lips tightened. He spoke in the old, ferocious voice and strode hither and thither in the old, tigerish fashion.

"I'll do nothing you don't want me to do, after we've talked it out," she answered, strong in her own power over him.

"Very well, then. And first I must have my coppice money—fifty-seven pounds, ten, my share came out at."

"You can draw it from the bank to Tavistock to-morrow."

"That's all right then. I'm like to be busy to-morrow by the looks of it. Now, mother, listen. Jill Bolt's the matter, and for God's sake don't say a word till I've done. She's being tortured to death—nothing less than that. And I won't suffer it no more. I've put it to her a dozen times that she's a fool to bide there. But some rotten ideas about virtue have kept her in hell linked to that drivelling fool of a man. Why, his flute's enough to make a decent woman cry out for divorce. If that's not cruelty, what is? And to cut a long story short, she's consented at last and is going to run away with me to-morrow night."

Mrs. Pomeroy shut her eyes for a moment. Then she rallied and looked at Ives.

"Going to run away? Well, the woman can't do more than that for 'e, to be sure," she said quietly.

The youth gave a triumphant grunt.

"There! I was right to trust you. You take it like the sensible wonder you are!"

A silence fell for some moments between them, while Avisa marshalled all her wits to fight this battle and the son rejoiced to believe that his mother was on his side. He had largely deluded himself of late, and Jill had helped the process. Now Ives believed that, thanks to his ini-

tiative, this great adventure was to befall him. He fancied that his own energies and resistless arguments had brought Jill to his way of thinking, that he had won her to his own idea of wisdom, that he had overborne her feminine scruples, enlarged her mind, and secured her reluctant consent to this romantic step by sheer force of masculine strength and will. In reality, however, Jill arranged her own plans and thought on ahead a great deal further than Ives dreamed. She had weighed the chances of this step, and her decision was largely guided by information as yet hidden from young Pomeroy.

"Speak, mother," said Ives. "I want to hear what you've got to say to Jill as a daughter-in-law. Because that's what it's going to be afore any of us be much older."

"You've had your unquiet moments afore you came to this, my son. You mustn't hurry me. There's unquiet moments for me just now, too. This is a far-reaching thing. I can't speak in a hurry."

"You're not going back on—not that I care if you do. My mind is settled."

She kept silence still. Her thoughts raced swiftly, and she arranged her plan of argument. Somebody must be sacrificed; and that person could only be Jill.

"You can judge how steadfast I am, mother, by my telling you."

"I can; yet I'm proud to think you set me so high as to tell me, while there was time."

"You'll never change me."

"I know that, but you may change yourself."

He turned sharply.

"Now you are going to begin one of those long——"

"Not I. 'Tis a short and sharp business, my dear. Only a thing never looks the same to any two pair of eyes. A bit ago I saw two strange laddies start to walk from Langstone Common to the top of Great Mis. 'Tis nought,' they said; 'us will be there in twenty minutes.' But they

didn't know of the valley and the river in between. These simple things be just they that have oftenest got a kink in 'em."

"There's no kink in this job, for I've thought it out to the end. I've been quiet and steady getting my plans all cut and dried and waiting for you to grow stronger, and now all's ready and the time has come."

"'Twas like your kind heart to wait for that. And you love me well enough to list to me even now, though I guess how full your thoughts are of t'other man's wife. 'Tis this way, Ives; you must think of her as well as yourself."

"Ban't I thinking of her?"

"Right well I know it; but think deeper. You take her; but you'll never marry her."

"Of course I will so soon as ever Bolt's divorced her."

"He won't divorce her."

"I'll make him!"

"Nought can make him. That's one side—hers. Here's another—yours this time. When did Mrs. Bolt say she'd run away with you?"

"On Monday last she had to promise, for I'd take no longer denial."

"I thought so. Did she tell you the news touching Samuel's uncle on Monday last?"

"The latest news is that he's not so well and going down the hill a bit. And that shows to her credit, for she puts me far ahead of the money Bolt will get."

"That's not the latest news of Samuel's uncle. The latest news is that he's going to marry the young woman in the shop. It came all of a sudden. 'Twas to be yesterday. No doubt it's done now."

"Jill didn't know it then."

"Jill knew it very well, for Samuel told me exactly how she took it when he broke the news."

"What did she care?"

"She cared so much that the very day she heard it, and not sooner, she decided for you."

"You've no right to say a dirty thing like that!"

"I be going to say still dirtier things, and you've got to hear 'em, unless you want your life to be ruined for evermore. Mind, 'tis life or death for you, or I'd never raise my voice against any living creature. Not a word would I say against Jill Bolt if it wasn't your salvation that was in danger. Indeed, and hers be too, for if he won't divorce her, what's to become of the pair of you?"

"What do we care? She loves me."

"I grant it—up to a certain cautious point. She's wiser far than you, and she knows, that, come what may, an honest man like you will stick to her and give her half that's his to the end. But do she think of you as well as herself? She knows right well Samuel would never divorce her; he'd think it wicked. Therefore she knows that she can never be your wife, however much she pretends."

"What do we care for the parson's twaddle?"

"That's not here nor there. I suppose you care for them as will follow? I suppose you don't want to get nameless childer? Does this woman look ahead or think or care what will happen to you saddled with another man's wife? 'Tis a great adventure, and like your bold spirit to think of such a thing, but I won't have you hoodwinked into a bad bargain while I can help it. Let her run away if she wants to. Let her run away a hundred times. But why with you?"

"Good God! You can ax that? Don't she love me, and only me?"

"Now Sam's money is done for perhaps she does, but not till then."

"'Tis a mean thing, mother, to harp on that."

"No, Ives, 'tis a proper and self-respecting thing. She

thought that you'd hear nothing of it till afterwards, and she'd have pretended, of course, that she didn't know it. But 'tis that has decided her, not your prayers. She's not worthy of you—not worthy of my son, and I say so, a woman little prejudiced against any living creature."

"I know her better far than you. She couldn't be so mean as that, I tell you."

"She's worse than that, Ives. Poor creature, I smart to have to fight her and hurt her behind her back; but 'tis you or her. She's not honest. She takes the man's money from his little store. Her step-mother told me. She'll come to you with a fat purse, mark me. Could you suffer that?"

Avisa talked on earnestly, made some strong points here and there, but conceded to her son certain other points in a manner very masterly. She knew the immense force of a concession to this man's mind. Nothing made him more tempted to yield himself than to find an opponent yielding. Her argument shifted presently from the welfare of Ives to the welfare of Jill; for she found that subject impressed him most. He was restive when she blamed the woman.

"I won't do no blackguard thing and go back on my word for anybody on God's earth," he said at last.

"Then don't make her go back on hers," answered Avisa quickly; "that's far, far worse. She's the man's wife and under oath to him. Why not? Why shouldn't she honour him? He's better than thousands, and a kind and trusting soul. For you to strike such a man! For my strong son Ives to lower himself to rob that poor, harmless creature! Like stealing a child's toy! And don't you go dreaming that she's a miserable woman, because it isn't so, whatever she may tell you."

"Yes, she is—bound to be with such a large spirit as hers. She's only been pretending of late, same as I have. Nought can keep us apart no more. I've gone much too

far to turn back now, for it's to-morrow night we're off, and nought that even you can say will keep me away from her to-morrow night."

But the mother laboured on, and first won a complete conciliation with respect to her own attitude. Ives admitted that Avisa only desired the best to happen for both parties; and that granted, she continued to plead with him, now for Jill and now for herself.

Very gradually she gained a little ground. She probed the wound of his self-esteem delicately yet firmly, and he smarted to think that Jill had been so exceedingly wise on her own behalf. He remembered, though he did not tell his mother, that there had indeed been no abandon about her love until the previous Monday. He could not fail to mark that she had become far more yielding since the news concerning Samuel's uncle. Until then she refused to promise anything definite and denied him the least lover's privileges. After those fleeting fires in the bluebell wood, when she let him carry her across the river, she had maintained a very strict attitude and only erred in liberty of speech. So far none could tax her with a greater crime than listening to the man and offering no protest to his proposals. Ives reflected upon the past and saw that, despite his denials, there was nothing in it that did not chime with his mother's theory. He gasped with secret wonder at her intuition. The day before Jill had coolly told him that she was going to take her husband's savings when she departed, and he had forbidden it, and been a little shaken that she could even dream of such a deed. And now his mother foretold that even such a thing Jill would be capable of doing.

Hours passed and still Avisa Pomeroy spoke. The clock whispered three, but neither heard it. The mother was strung up to a tense excitation of mind that could not feel fatigue. She poured out words as never before had she poured them. Some inner prompting told her that this

was the supreme moment of her life, and she did not spare herself.

And the man listened; now swore and strode this way and that, now sat down again and set out his views, now strove to spin some new sophism with a vocabulary that was scarcely equal to utter the thought in his head. He suffered deeply and turned and twisted before the steady onslaught. But he listened; he did not fly from the opposition. Reason had its way with him between frantic flashes of unreason. "On the brazen table of the brow," says Herder, "are deeply engraved every combination of sense and soul. I can conceive no spectator to whom the forehead appears uninteresting. Here all the graces revel or all the Cyclops thunder." Such a play of contending forces now strove visibly on the front of Pomeroy. That night, lines dawned there never to be ruled out again. Headlong obstinacy, stubborn resistance, injured pride, doubt, love, grief, and passion swept in separate or mingled storms across his square forehead; now drew down deep wrinkles to the eyebrows; now swept all smooth at moments of intense thought; now knotted in fury; now flashed downward into the muscles that ran over the cheeks to the mouth; now leapt upwards, when some rare side-laugh at one of his mother's thoughts for a moment banished the haggard care out of his face.

He was firm, but Avisa was firmer. Once or twice she felt a physical collapse threatening her body, but she persisted, and finally got him to promise faithfully that he would do nothing whatever until he had again spoken with her on the morrow.

Then scarcely seeing the grey dawn, she left him, went up to her chamber, and addressed her further arguments and prayers to her God. Morning was lifted high upon the earth before, in terrible fatigue, she slept. But ere the balm of that blessed anodyne came to rest and relieve the mother, an unusual physical event overtook her; she

wept long and bitterly. Since childhood none had ever seen much more than the twinkle of an unshed tear on her face, and very seldom even in secret did sorrow so express itself with her.

She dried her eyes anon, read far into another day, and turned the leaves of her Bible with swift familiar hands; while her son, also waking, tossed upon his bed and planned fresh arguments for the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LETTER

LITTLE was said during the following morning, though Ives knew that his mother would speak with him before nightfall. He felt shaken but unconvinced. She did not guess how much her words had influenced him, and a great physical exhaustion from which she suffered on awakening, affected her mind and led her to take a hopeless view of the situation. She grew stronger during the day and nerved herself for the last struggle. Little time remained, because her son had plainly told her that he was going to leave Merivale with Mrs. Bolt in the small hours of the following morning. Jill's preparations would doubtless be made that day; his own, as he had declared, were already made. He intended to be away from Vixen Tor for six weeks, and his share of the money from the cutting of the oak coppice was to pay for it. By that time he imagined that Jill would be divorced and his way clear to marry her.

But a thing happened more significant than Pomeroy's silence during these pregnant hours: he made no more mention of his money and did not go to Tavistock to draw it. Hourly his mother expected him to ask for a cheque; but the time slipped on past noon and he took no step. Her heart beat high and hope came to her. As the hours advanced she nerved herself and secretly prayed that she might have but one glimpse into her boy's heart, the better to prevail with him. But his heart was hidden; he even avoided her glances that she might not read his eyes. He slunk through the day as though ashamed of the past rather than the future. She could not perfectly apprehend

his attitude, but rather feared that what she saw was the outward sign of inward suffering. She suspected that he meant to have Jill at any cost and was ashamed of himself for the determination. She believed that his soul was affirmed to do evil and that he smarted in consequence, and went heavily till the night came. Once again in company of the woman, this emotion—this constraint and self-contempt—would doubtless vanish from him. But precious hours yet remained, and Avisa thirsted to be with her son alone.

The mother, however, erred in this theory of Pomeroy's present attitude. Indeed, she over-praised his true emotion; though the conscience of Ives had nothing else it was that tormented him into this gloomy condition and made him more than common saturnine and fierce. His conscience, however, stabbed with a different wound than Avisa imagined. It may be granted that Ives was suffering, that he was heaping a very generous load of self-contempt and scorn upon himself. Further it must be confessed that he thus hated himself for what he was going to do: thus far his mother guessed correctly. But her error lay in misjudgment of his reason for grief. He had made up his mind not to run away with Jill, and for that he now hated himself with all his might. He longed for her body still; but the high chivalry and the romance of the proceeding were all dust and ashes since he had spoken with his mother on the previous night. The poetry of this great experience perished out of it when he heard that Jill's decision was based on the sordid circumstance of her husband's uncle and his plans. It chimed with a good deal else in her that had jarred on the occasions of their secret meetings. The thought gradually inflamed him to bitter anger, and, having fully digested it, Ives decided that he would not marry Jill.

First he stopped there. He determined with himself that he would run away with her, amuse himself with her,

and ultimately leave her to her own devices. It was on the edge of sleep that he came to this conclusion; but it did not bear the light of a waking mind. He rose and the intention vanished. Then he began to make up his mind anew. But he was now determined not to marry Jill even if he could do so; and since his nocturnal thought seemed vain, if not actually vile by daylight there remained nothing but to abandon the enterprise altogether. It was here that his virile conscience pricked him and made him hang his head. He was not in the least ashamed of himself at the idea of going on; but the decision to stop made him much ashamed. He felt a paltry coward; he pictured Jill's opinion of him when she should learn at this, the eleventh hour, that he had changed his mind. She would probably ask herself whether there were no men left in the world. She would class him in her mind henceforth with that feeble dust, her husband. To change now must certainly be an act as weak as any that Samuel Bolt had ever committed. Ives spurned himself, loathed himself, and felt unclean in this determination to do rightly. Again and again he cried to his heart that he meant to do right, but not because it was right. He believed now most steadfastly that she would never have agreed to leave her husband for him until the certainty of a future fortune vanished; and upon this opinion his decision was formed. In some measure Avisa had aided this decision. She had enlarged his angle of mind to the question, sharpened his reason, that was blunted by longing for the woman, and lifted him insensibly to higher thinking and an attitude more adult; but nothing had really availed her but the actual fact of Jill's suspended decision. Pride easily tramples lust under foot in some hearts, and pride conquered with Pomeroy.

He told his mother when evening came, and such was his concentration of mind upon himself, that he quite forgot the other side until Avisa reminded him. He had not in-

tended to see or communicate with Jill. He spoke in heat and uttered oaths and profanities; he made it very clear that his motive for this change of mind was no desire of right, but rather wounded pride. Blinded by wild anger he went back on his morning clarity of thought and declared that Jill deserved to be ruined. Then his mother answered him and with infinite skill took care to utter no word that might add a pang to his smarting spirit.

"You are yourself in this," she said. "And your justice was bound to bring you to it, Ives. 'Tis your ruling passion, and always have been—justice to men and women and children. I'll not be talking now, and I'll not judge your motives, but I will say you've done the wisest thing you could—for her as well as for yourself. There's a large lesson looming ahead for her, too. I 'shouldn't see her to-night. Just write one of your short, swift letters. And don't play about with reasons. There's nought on God's earth more dangerous than giving reasons for some of the things we do."

"Write to her—why? I'll neither write nor see her."

"For her husband's sake more than her own. She'll be going to meet you, I suppose."

"I'd forgot that! When I gived up the thought of meeting her it seemed as if all the world must know it, and her with the rest."

Avisa nodded.

"A very natural feeling; but as yet she don't know. Better write a line and get it to her to-night—to her own hand somehow."

For answer he turned to the desk in the corner of the kitchen. It was a lofty affair with a high stool. The lid was padlocked and the receptacle beneath held all the business papers of Vixen Tor Farm.

Ives wrote several letters, swore aloud between each effort, and tore them up one after the other.

"I keep on giving her a sting about that blasted money,"

he explained; "but that's a thought mean and I can't let myself down to do it."

Avisa did not answer and he wrote again.

"I want to get it into as few words as I can," he said. "I don't intend to do anything small as a man to a woman, but in justice to myself I must make her see I had a very proper reason for changing."

He wrote and at last satisfied himself; then he blotted his letter, sealed it into an envelope, and set the single word "Jill" upon it.

He did not offer to show it to his mother, and she did not reveal the least interest to learn what it contained.

"That girl will hate me like hell after this," he said.

"She'll come to hate herself far worse even than you after a bit."

"Yes," he said. "And I know what a damned unpleasant feeling that is—nobody better. I hate myself with all my heart this minute."

He rose and took his hat.

"'Tis after nine o'clock," he said. "I'll drop in for a few words with Sammy, or take a message from you to his mother. Then I'll see that she gets this unbeknownst to him."

He left his home and went out into the summer night. It was warm and somewhat close. He thought of the Windystone and the tryst there appointed for three o'clock on the following morning. She would be ready with the few things that she meant to take packed in a bag. He himself had bought her the bag for that purpose.

The squeak of a flute fell on Pomeroy's ear as he approached Mr. Bolt's cottage; but Samuel was on the other side of the road in his mother's home. The window stood wide open and the room was lighted. Old Mrs. Bolt sat smiling with her face turned to her son, while Samuel, with shut eyes and bulging cheeks, played the tune of a hymn: "Abide with me; fast falls the eventide." Upon his arm

he still wore a black band for his baby. Samuel's own cottage appeared to be dark save for a gleam of light over the front door; but the kitchen faced upon the other side and Ives doubted not that Jill was there. A sudden longing struck upon him to go in and see her. But his desires towards her and his new knowledge of her could not live together. He had only to summon the one to cool the other. Now he slipped his letter under the cottage door, waited till Samuel's flute was uttering a shriller note than usual, then rapped loudly thrice and went his way. She was bound to hear and must see the letter when she entered the lamp-lit passage.

But Jill neither heard nor saw. All was ready for her flight. At two o'clock, when her husband slept, she meant to leave her home and return no more. She had gone to bed very early that she might enjoy a few hours of sleep before the great exodus. From the other side of the road her husband's flute squeaked faintly, as it ranged over his mother's favourite hymns; and Jill's last waking thought was that she would never hear the odious sound again.

When Ives went home, Avisa had gone to bed. She knew that he would not want her any more on this night. Therefore she withdrew herself and he was glad. He felt sore with his mother. The emotion shamed him, but he knew that it was real. He thought of Jill reading his letter and writhed.

Meantime the husband it was, and not the wife, who found that fateful note. Sammy returned home soon after ten o'clock. The house was silent and he did not doubt that Jill had gone to bed according to her habit. As he locked the front door his eye caught sight of an envelope on the floor; and he picked it up and stared at the solitary word "Jill" written large across it. Sammy did not know the hand but felt somewhat interested. Letters seldom came to his house, and when they did, his wife or himself would open them, as chance willed. He took down

the lamp from a plaster bracket, representing an angel, and went into the kitchen. Then he drew himself half a pint of beer and opened Pomeroy's letter to his wife.

Samuel read every word through five times. After doing so, he set down the page and stared before him. So silent and so still he sat, that two mice, scurrying hither and thither like shadows, drew near his boots, found a fragment of food and nibbled there.

Thus wrote the lover:

"DEAR JILL:

"A good deal has happened in my mind since we planned to be off together to-night. I've thought about a few sides of the subject that I hadn't thought of before, and I shan't be at the Windystone to-morrow morning at three o'clock as arranged. You'll live to see we are better apart and that there is nothing to be gained by ruining yourself on my account. Because your poor husband would never take a divorce, and that being so . . . I haven't changed my mind because I'm afraid of anything, or want to do right or any nonsense like that. It is not because I care a curse for anybody, or anything anybody can do. All the same I've got a very good reason for changing my mind, and if by chance you can't guess it and think you've a right to know it, I should not hesitate to tell you. And, though I'm doing this, I loved you a lot more than ever you loved me really, for all your speeches. But I won't say any more than to hope you'll be happy some day or other. As for me, I don't expect it and don't look for it.

"Yours very truly,
"IVES POMEROY."

Mr. Bolt came slowly to himself after helplessly reading and re-reading this communication. At first he was frightened rather than angry. Once he rose and put

on his hat; but he remembered that his mother would long since be asleep. Then he decided that, as became a man, he would thresh out this tremendous circumstance single-handed. He paused to wonder at his own courage, then asked himself what he must do. He read the letter again and tried to grasp how much had gone before it. It was clear that Ives Pomeroy and Jill had arranged to run away that night, and that Ives, at the last moment, had changed his mind. He must have come himself with the letter, heard Samuel's fife, and felt it safe to leave the letter for Jill. Mr. Bolt then permitted himself to wonder what sort of relations had obtained in the past between the pair. This line of thought awoke emotion. It was perhaps hardly worthy to be called anger, but he was certainly very much irritated. He struck the letter in the face with his fist, called Pomeroy a scoundrel, and walked up and down the kitchen; but first he took off his boots that he might not waken Jill overhead. Suddenly a cold sweat burst out all over him. Perhaps she was not overhead; possibly she had already gone to the Windystone. He crept upstairs to see and stood at the open bedroom door. She was in bed and sound asleep. He heard her steady, regular breathing.

Samuel descended again, saw his beer, and drank it. He mopped his forehead and read the letter once more. He thought for yet another half-hour; then his mind began to wander and, to his surprise, he grew sleepy. He started up indignantly, read the letter again and began saying more harsh things of Pomeroy under his breath. Nevertheless, he felt thankful that Ives had changed his mind, and he began to wonder what had made him do so. Samuel found his spirit grow milder as the night advanced. He even ventured to hope that it was God who had worked this miracle in the mind of Pomeroy and thus saved all parties. He felt weak and quite worn out, but yet realised that he could hardly retire without taking some definite

step. For the moment Pomeroy might be disregarded, since he was not going to the Windystone, but without a doubt Jill intended to do so. He must, of course, stop that and have it out with her. In his present weary condition the necessity for this terrible deed depressed him. He tried to work himself into a fury with her and failed. He drew himself some more beer and read the letter again. His head kept nodding, and presently he passed beyond recovery and fell very soundly asleep. For nearly two hours he thus remained, and then woke to find the lamp smelling and the light of it reduced to an azure bead of fire.

Samuel came slowly to his senses and had an inspiration. He felt that to fall into a fierce quarrel with Jill at this time of night was physically impossible for him; his system cried aloud for sleep, and he hardly knew how to get upstairs to bed. But his mind gave an expiring flash, even as the lamp had done, and he had a great idea. He lighted a candle, locked up the letter, and went to bed. He had decided upon terrible revenge. For a moment its dimensions frightened him, and the probable result made him nervous; but he was too far gone even to fear. He decided that he would do nothing at all! Though in itself a plan unheroic, yet the consequences must be very considerable. His silence meant that Jill would presently rise and go off to the Windystone. Samuel fumbled at his buttons and dragged off his clothes.

"People may think it harsh," he mumbled under his breath to himself, "but let 'em; I don't care what they say. 'Tis a fine summer night and warm as milk from the cow. Let her go and sit there and wait for naught! He won't come; but us'll hope the Lord will, and show my wife her great cruelty and wickedness."

When he lay by sleeping Jill's side and felt her tawny hair against his face, Samuel's spirits sank and he wept. The immensity of this wrong overwhelmed him. He began

to argue that it was not Jill's fault at all, but the man's. He had tempted her with lies and the devil had helped him. Samuel felt cold and wretched after his sleep below; but he did not creep close to Jill for warmth as was his custom. "No! I've got my dignity," he said to himself.

Some while afterwards she woke him getting up, despite the stealthiness of her movements. He pretended to be still asleep. She dressed in the dark and left the room. He heard her open and shut the door; then her feet sounded outside. He peeped from the window, but it was too dark to see her. His mood had changed. He felt rested and refreshed. An emotion of light-heartedness overtook him. He surprised himself by laughing at the picture of Jill waiting for one who would not come. He got back into bed and rolled over to the warm lair that Jill had left. He was just going to sleep again when a new idea, somewhat splendid at first glance, made him sit up and rub his eyes. "How would it be if I was to get in my clothes and go after her and forgive her and bring her back?" he asked himself. He even went so far as to light a candle and put on his socks. Then he took them off again and blew the candle out. "Won't risk it—might be dangerous and tragical," he murmured regretfully. "She'll be expecting that bad fellow, and if I come up and tell her that he ban't coming, 'tis any odds she'll lose her temper with me, and say things, or even do things, that us both should much regret. I'll leave her in the Lord's hands. I'll kneel on my knees and lift my soul to Him; I'll—I'll—'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' Shall us poor worms——"

Here he sank finally to sleep and did not wake again until the sun had risen.

Elsewhere Ives Pomeroy, sleepless, tossed and turned, and sometimes standing at his open window, looked through the darkness to where westerly the Windystone stood on the edge of the Moor. He thought of the silence that two

voices had meant to break there. He pictured the ancient granite brooding alone under night, and a whim woke in him to go forth and keep the promised appointment, even though he knew that the woman would not now do so. He sneered at his folly and returned to bed.

CHAPTER XXV

VIGIL

In a gap of the hills, nigh Feather Tor and westerly of the Vixen, stands an old, crooked, granite post. The Windystone is seven feet high and from afar suggests some giant human figure bending forward as he tramps the desolation; but seen at hand this memorial of the middle ages resolves itself into the symbol of Christianity. Shaft and arms are octagonal and in fair preservation. Centuries of wild weather, flood and frost, have driven the cross out of the perpendicular; time has fretted its angles; mean spirits have bitten the broad arrow into its base; but still the grey stone, clad in venerable vesture of jade and black lichens, shall be seen to stand nobly upon the heath. It glitters by day with the transparent quartz crystals that form a part of its amorphous substance; and by night withdraws into a brooding and formless shadow against the sky. A streamlet winds beside it and sings the primeval song of moving water. The burn carries on her breast shining stars of crowfoot, and these open their little silver eyes almost at the foot of the cross lifted above them.

Hither came Jill Bolt under the stars and sat her down and waited. She used the Windystone for a support, cast her new bag beside her, and turned her face to the east. Thence must come Ives Pomeroy and the dawn, and she felt as sure of the one as the other. Their future together had been pretty fully planned on the assumption that Samuel would divorce Jill at the earliest opportunity. Then Ives had arranged to marry her and bring her home to Vixen Tor Farm as his wife. He had rather more than

fifty pounds to spend, and she had saved twenty-five. This was her own, and she carried it in her pocket now.

Jill was early and rather regretted that she should have first arrived. She spent the minutes that separated her from the man by considering her attitude towards him. She liked him well enough; but it could not be said that she loved him. Her present desperate proceeding was purely selfish, and she had not finally determined to trust herself with him until all hope of worldly prosperity with Samuel was at an end. Had Mr. Bolt's uncle remained a bachelor and continued calmly to dwindle and decline, she would have endured Samuel until the end; and this the more readily because she suspected that her husband himself was not likely to be a long-lived man. He coughed a great deal and, as his wife, she marked many signs which pointed to low vitality. But now that the Plymouth bookseller was about to marry, the hope of the Bolts had disappeared, and Jill perceived that even though she waited for Samuel's death, it must leave her a widow nearly penniless. Pomeroy promised no very great earthly prosperity; but he was a man, and Vixen Tor Farm appealed a good deal more to Jill than her home at Merivale. What Mrs. Pomeroy would say or do, she did not consider. The subject indeed often struck her mind through these desperate days, but she banished it. This was an ill return for Avisa's goodness.

Sampford Spiney church clock struck three and Jill strained her ears for the step of Ives. Light began to be felt rather than seen and the eastern hills were defining themselves, but the world still slept; the stars still shone overhead and the water at her feet still reflected their light.

The morning wind awoke, sighed out of his deep, hungry heart, and roamed restless until dawn should come and throw her rosy loveliness into his bosom. Waking creatures shambled past Jill. Mares and little foals went

by; cattle stirred and blew sleep from their nostrils, and rose out of their beds in the fern. They loomed gigantic in the darkness and their sounds slowly sank away as they passed to their haunts. Jill got up, shivered a little, took her bag and walked to the granite ledges of Feather Tor where they extended above the Windystone. She felt uneasy, for the man was ten minutes late—a circumstance very hard to understand at such a time. Pure silver light stole over the sky and drowned the stars, but the earth was still very dark. Birds called; the world revolved to the sun and soon a rusty red lattice and tangle of dim fire fretted the east. The hour was half-past three and the Moor stretched stark to Vixen. Every stone and bush and knap shone clear against the increasing glory of the day; but no sign of Ives appeared upon the path that he should have trodden an hour ago.

Jill stared at the sky, and anger heated her blood and banished the cold begot of nightly vigil. False and perjured always from his youth up, he had been true to himself even at this crisis, had rejected the thing so long hungered and yearned for, even at the moment when it became his own. Her insulted womanhood had no large immediate choice of action. The sun would be shining in half an hour, and it became necessary for Jill to disappear in one direction or another. To run away alone was absurd; therefore she chose the alternative and went quietly back to Merivale before the village should be waking. Even as she went she turned often and looked along his way. But he did not come. At last the road was hidden, and she walked on and felt that a vital chapter of her life's story had slipped from it. The chapter that she had sketched so carefully Fate refused to insert in her life. A void must henceforth exist: a section planned but never executed.

She strove to hold her judgment in suspense, but failed. She tried hard to assume a good reason for the absence of

Ives, but could not. Nothing but death, or some physical catastrophe that had deprived him of the power to come to her, could explain his defection in any manner to be endured. But she felt positive that no misfortune had overtaken him. She chose rather to remember his unstable character and to suspect that he had really changed his mind at the last possible moment and not been at the trouble to let her know it. She hated him very heartily as she went home. That he should not have prevented her from keeping the tryst seemed to Jill at that moment a thing as bad, if not worse, than that he should have failed to come himself. He had made her a fool in her own eyes—perhaps in the eyes of others. She determined on a bitter reckoning if he could not clear himself. It is to be recorded that the mother of Ives did not intrude at all upon Mrs. Bolt's speculations as she hastened home and stealthily entered her husband's house. At no time did she associate Avisa with the matter.

Jill found her husband sleeping very heavily. She restored to their usual places the things in her bag; she locked up her money in a little desk. She changed her gown and hid her soaking boots and stockings for the present. Then she went down and lighted the fire.

Interesting emotions overtook her spirit during these processes. She moved among objects to which she had bidden eternal farewell; she performed duties which she had seen and felt herself perform for the last time. The anticlimax sickened her. For relief she flung herself into the full storm that now filled her heart against Pomeroy. Furious fires burnt in her soul. She raged after the grand manner, and the white heat and scorch of her spirit did her good and sweetened the sick air of her mind. The tornado passed. She smoothed her forehead and prepared her husband's breakfast. He was late, and she went out to the cottage door for a time and spoke to a neighbour. Her object was to learn if anything

unusual had been reported from Vixen Tor Farm, but there came no news, good or bad. Jill, however, heard something that interested her not a little and promised a possibility of light in the darkness.

Mr. Joel Toop, who always rose an hour earlier than his brother, appeared. He was taking a sow and her litter into Tavistock market. They exchanged greetings and Mr. Toop explained his gloom.

"You'll see me looking wisht and down in the mouth, Mrs. Bolt. 'Tis such an unmanly cast of countenance in a general way, and so unlike me, that I must explain it. This is a black day for me and Peter and *The Jolly Huntsmen*. 'For why?' you ask. Because that silly woman, Ruth Rendle, be leaving us. Whoever would have thought that a creature reckoned to be full of sense, really had so little when it came to the point?"

"Really going?"

"Yes; to be a sort of all round useful help and companion to her friend, Mrs. Pomeroy at Vixen Tor. I never would sanction it and I don't now. It's a great come down from *The Jolly Huntsmen*, everybody must see that. However, she's going—for a time—short or long. We've got a new barmaid—a widow this time."

He went on his way and Jill thought that she began to apprehend. It was not news to her that Ruth was going to Vixen Tor. Ives had told her all about it long ago and rejoiced, on his mother's account, that it should be so; because Ruth would take his place while he was away with Jill. But now the fact, from being insignificant, swelled at every outline and bulked huge as a thundercloud.

Still the exhausted Samuel slept; therefore Jill wakened him. He sat up, rubbed his eyes and stared.

"You!" he said.

"Yes, I suppose so. Who should it be?" she asked. "Get up—your meat's cold—'tis nearly seven o'clock."

"Ban't going to work to-day," he answered slowly.

"Not going to work—why not?"

"For a lot of reasons. Firstly, the engine's not to be out, and what I've got to do to it I can do on Monday early afore I get steam; at least that's not the first reason, but 'twill serve well enough."

He began to dress. A strange sensation struck him that it was improper to put on his clothes before this woman any more; she had gone out of his life. Then he perceived that she had evidently come back into his life again. Hope rose in him. She might have run away altogether; instead she had chosen to return of her free will and without the least interference. This argued very hopefully in Samuel's opinion. He rose and descended to find Jill outwardly in a most placid mind. She had prepared a good breakfast for him, and he marked one or two little special actions that she had performed on his behalf. These were often omitted. Doubtless this terrific lesson began to bear fruit already. He fancied that Jill had a slight cold and expressed a fear to that effect. She assured him that it was not so. He felt himself yielding and anger dropping from his heart.

"Drink another cup of tea along wi' me," he said.

She obeyed.

He found the letter on his lips a score of times, but delayed that horror as long as possible.

Jill began to wash up and Samuel watched her.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Nothing in particular—unless——"

An idea suddenly struck him. He dimly guessed the unfathomed depths of discomfort in Jill's mind, and it occurred to him that she ought to be distracted after her recent tragical experiences. Moreover, he felt that it might be easier to tell her the truth after an interval.

"I suppose you wouldn't care to come to Tavistock Cattle Fair and revel to-day?" he asked. "'Twill be a gay business, and I feel you haven't had a holiday for

long. I'll put on my best, and take the band off my arm if you'll come."

Rather to his surprise, and much to his satisfaction, she consented.

"I'll go if you're set on it."

"That's all right then. Us'll smarten up a bit and get off in an hour's time."

The day passed prosperously, and Jill was glad to meet various acquaintance, including Rupert Johnson from Vixen Tor. She desired that Ives should know his outrage of the previous night had made no difference to her.

Samuel, for his part, lost no opportunity to please his wife, and spent a good deal of money on her account; but his own pleasure was spoiled by the recollection of what must come at the end of the day. Mr. Bolt longed to destroy Pomeroy's letter altogether and forget it; but that was not possible. It seemed to him necessary for future peace that Jill should learn the truth. The ordeal loomed large and destroyed his content. Indeed he grew nervous towards evening.

It was past ten o'clock when they returned home and nearly eleven before they had finished their supper. Then Samuel went to his desk, unlocked it, and produced the letter.

"I'm sorry I've got to end this beautiful day in rather a serious manner," he said; "but there's some things didn't ought to be put off too long, and this is one of 'em in my opinion. Here's a letter from Ives Pomeroy to you, Jill."

The woman started and put out her hand for it.

"I must tell you that it comed pretty late last night, when you was in bed and asleep. And as your husband and a man from who you oughtn't to have secrets, I found it when I got home, and I read it. I may tell you, Jill, that it upset me a great deal, and I ban't going to make

light of it even now. My first thought was to do something rash and desperate; but I didn't. Please to read it through; then I've got a bit more to say."

She took the letter and read it slowly; then she put it down on the table, leant back in her chair, and crossed her hands over her breast.

"Go on," she said. Jill believed that she had long since fathomed Samuel, but here was a depth of pusillanimity almost inconceivable. Mr. Bolt, however, did not think so. He evidently held that his course of action was rather severe.

"You see how 'twas. I came home to find you on the verge of destruction, but this here letter told me the destroyer had changed his evil mind. And what had changed it, d'you reckon? Why, the only Person that's got the power to do such a thing, namely, God Almighty. So that settled the matter as far as Ives Pomeroy was concerned. I left him in better hands than mine, Jill, though I feel a bit dangerous still when I think of him. Then I had to consider about you. Well, of course, I knowed that somehow he'd got you to promise to do this wicked thing. You was the weaker vessel, and you'd always had a bit of a feeling for the man, and no doubt his cunning words foxed you into thinking that he loved you better than what I do."

"Why for didn't you wake me last night and have this out then?"

"Because—for several reasons. One was I hadn't the heart. You must remember this comed as a terrible shock to me; it made my flesh water and my bones jelly. I've gone my way and never thought of such a thing in all my life. I quite thought that you and me and mother was all settling down again and getting along perfectly smooth and comfortable. Especially since mother promised only to come in once a week. And I felt very low about it, I can tell you, last night at midnight, with the silence of

the grave all round about and not a hand to comfort me."

"Why didn't you come upstairs and pull me out of bed by the hair and cut my throat?"

"'Twould only have been one more nastiness in the newspapers. I hope to God, whatever happens, I shall never get in print; besides, I'm not that sort. But I said to myself, stern-like, that you'd got to suffer, Jill. You mustn't take it too harshly in me, but I felt very strong that my bounden duty was to let you suffer a bit. So what did I do, but just harden my heart against you, and go to bed, and let you march off to cool your heels and wait for the rascal? And I thought the cross of Christ up along, in the shape of the Windystone, might very likely do the rest; and I'm sure I hope it have, Jill. And I don't think as a reasonable woman, who's just escaped making a proper mess of her life, that you can say the punishment I ordained was too heavy for you. To be frank with you, I very nearly rose up and came to fetch you after daylight; but 'no,' I said to myself. 'I'll let her suffer to the bitter end, for her soul's sake.' 'Twas my unsleeping love for you made me do it, Jill, and you oughtn't to think none the worse of me for it."

"I suppose I was mad to dream of doing it."

"You was; but they smooth-tongued men—very few can stand against them. However, God don't forget a sparrow."

"And what next?" she asked. "Be you going to forgive me for this bit of wickedness?"

"Certainly I be," he answered. "I forgived you this morning when you woke me and told me that breakfast was ready. I can see how all this has looked from your point of view. Of course 'twas a great disappointment in its way; but take my word for it, he wouldn't have worn very well."

"Never mention his name again to me."

"I don't want to. Let him go to his reward. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.' But the thing is to know how us all stand now. You see, if he's to hear that I had your letter and that I read it, then he'll naturally expect me, as a wronged husband, to do something sharp. There's a worldly side to this, and there's my manhood. At the least I ought to go to the length of being vexed with the man in public. I ought really to pull his nose afore the people."

"You ought to break his blasted neck!"

"No, Jill, I'm a Christian first and a husband afterwards, as we all should be."

"Best way out is to let him think I had the letter and never went to the Windystone at all."

"I'm afraid 'twould be acting a lie, however."

She stared at him.

"God's truth! What stuff be you built of?" she said. "Not true? Perhaps not; but a long way better than the truth, I should reckon. You'm such a peace-loving and patient man that you ought to jump at it. That plan lets you out altogether. Nobody need ever know the —the pretty truth."

"Of course I'd very much rather have it so, if 'tis within the bounds of honesty."

"Certainly 'tis. To hide the truth ban't to tell a lie. Leave the rest to me; and leave the man to me. My quarrel's quite so big as yours—maybe bigger."

"I must ask you to have nothing more to do with him," said Mr. Bolt firmly; "that I demand, Jill. I have my feelings, too, and they've been a good bit rasped by this job. I'll go further and order you—order you on your oath—to swear you'll never speak to him, or write to him, or open a letter from him as long as you live, so help you God. What he meant to do to me is only too clear; and we've got to thank the Almighty that it didn't happen."

"Better leave it at that then. I'll swear anything you

like. You're a good sort, under your awful softness—too good for such as me, anyway."

"So be it," he answered. "Now tear up that letter and we'll go to bed."

"I'll read it again once in the morning," she replied. "There's a lot to be learned of men in general and their wicked ways from such a letter."

"And the ways of God in their hearts also. Remember that. 'Twas God, and only God, prompted him to go back on his planned wickedness. And I dare say his mother helped the Almighty, as such women can."

At this speech Jill began to wonder what was really hidden behind the letter and the motives that had prompted Ives to write it. She felt, however, that these questions could hardly interest Samuel.

"As you've been so big-hearted over this, I'll ask you one thing," Jill said. "Ban't the time for me to beg favours, I know. I ought to be on my knees afore you; but all the same, I do beg and pray of you not to tell your mother, Samuel. Don't make me out any wickeder in her eyes, just when she is beginning to think a bit better of me. I'm a repentant and contrite woman and God knows it."

"I never meant to tell her," he answered. "Not mother or any other person will ever hear of last night's work from me."

She put away the little presents that he had bought her at Tavistock, slipped Pomeroy's letter into her pocket, extinguished the lamp, and followed her husband upstairs.

"I wish I could pray a bit aloud, as some men have the art and gift," said Samuel presently as he prepared for bed. "But I've no skill that way. However, when I go on my knees presently, you may be sure, Jill, I shall be thanking the Lord for His mercies. And I beg to hope you'll do the same."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TIDE EBBS

CHANCE timed Ruth Rendle's coming to Vixen Tor so that it served a good purpose to the man she loved. Never had Ives stood in such need of distraction from his own mind as at the present; never had he so fretted and beat the unbending bars of circumstance. His spirit was bruised and sore; for some time he continued impatient of his mother's company, and she well understood with what he associated her and kept out of his way as much as possible. The task was the more difficult for Avisa because she knew what Ives did not: that her illness gained upon her unseen. For a time his own tribulations blinded him; then rose the dawn of other interests, and after Ruth Rendle had been a month at the farm he began to perceive the significance of her presence. She avoided him, but she discussed him when Avisa or old Mrs. Pomeroy desired to do so, and, unknown to herself, Ruth's secret swiftly slipped from her into the keeping of the mother.

They spoke together one night while Avisa sat up for Ives. Of late it was Ruth who, under Mrs. Pomeroy's direction, prepared the young man's suppers. Then, at the sound of his coming, she vanished to bed and Ives enjoyed speech with his mother. She had denied herself these evenings for many weeks, that she might not force the past upon him by her presence. Then the son expressed a desire for her company again, and thankfully she granted it.

Upon this night the talk first ran on Northmore. He had broken his collar-bone in a fall when hunting. Ives visited him and found him frankly unfriendly; Mr. Peter Toop also called upon the sufferer, and to him Matthew

had confessed a weariness and hatred of life. At the farmer's earnest entreaty Ruth Rendle also went to see Matthew; and she took a little gift of heather honey from Mrs. Pomeroy. Afterwards, though she concealed much that passed between them, she, too, related to Avisa how Northmore had cried against his fate and cursed the business of living.

"Cruel changed from what once he was," she said. "And he haven't got a word of thanks for his fortune in light of his trouble, though Mr. Toop tells me he's wonderful prosperous with his cattle."

"That's an everyday case, Ruth. Folk down on their luck find no time to sort the good that happens to 'em from the bad. And if you remind 'em, they think you hard-hearted. Past good fortune never yet healed present bad."

"I feel like a murderess when I look at him."

"Terrible obstinate—a man of one idea—more's the pity. One might almost think the old saying, 'Lucky in life unlucky in love,' was true."

"What can I do?"

"There's nothing you can do—unless . . . However, we can't help you there. 'Tis something none can do for you. . . ."

Ruth guessed her meaning.

"'Twould be better if he was to marry—not if I was to. There's a plenty would be proud to take him."

"He's marrying the whisky bottle, 'tis hinted, poor fellow."

"Can't you go and see him, such power as you have, Mrs. Pomeroy?"

Avisa shook her head.

"'Tis no use, I'm afraid. We understand one another. I'm fond of Matthew Northmore—always was. There's a great deal of high-mindedness in him. 'Tis a terrible thing when a man comes to love hopelessly at his age.

A young chap can get over his disappointments in time, at least I pray God 'tis so: but such as him are different, and after love's melted 'em once into its mould and they've run hard into it, there's no changing. They'll break, but they can't thaw."

"He'd not be angry with you if you spoke serious to him."

"But he would. Man or woman can't brook a third party in such a matter, especially if the third party comes with advice. Besides, I'm—he knows."

There was a silence and Ruth, pursuing the thread of thoughts wakened by this last remark, remembered incidents now far past and made an artless confession.

"I was cruel vexed with you once, if you can believe it. Right down savage, and on that very man—Matthew Northmore, I mean—I poured out my anger."

"You 'right down savage,' Ruth! 'Twas a funny sight, I should think. How did I come to anger you so much?"

"'Twas that terrible sad business long ago when Ives—when he went away for a bit—you remember."

"Yes, I remember. And do you?"

Ruth rose, sat beside the mother, and took her hand.

"In my wicked ignorance and passion I stood up in the bar that night to *The Jolly Huntsmen* and forgot myself afore the men there, and rated Northmore and stung him with the bitterest words I could call up! Yes; he said you was right and a brave, good, true mother to do what you did do; and I flamed out, like the fool I was, and spoke unmaidenly, and dared to tell 'em you was no true mother—God forgive me."

Avisa's hand tightened on the other's. For some time she did not answer; then she asked a question.

"D'you think so still?"

"No, indeed—you were right."

Another still lengthier silence fell and Mrs. Pomeroy

leisurely considered all that was hidden in Ruth's confession. For a moment she guessed that the girl had chosen this way to make implicit confession of the truth; then she dismissed the idea. No such subtlety belonged to Ruth. She had let out her secret innocently and the question next rose in the mother's mind whether to ignore or to acknowledge it. She suspended her inclination and only argued with herself for the greatest good to Ives. She had time to wonder with herself at two things: how she had failed to read this truth long since, and how, under the circumstance of loving Ives, Ruth Rendle had been able to come to Vixen Tor. Answers came to both problems swiftly. She suspected that her own physical miseries might be tending to dull perception and modify her old swiftness of mind, even where Ives was concerned. Therefore she had missed this significant fact; while with regard to the girl, Avisa guessed that Ruth found love too strong to fight against and could not choose, when chance offered, but be drawn into the little system, where Ives shone as the sun. To a mother's heart this seemed a most natural circumstance and she rejoiced with great joy at the discovery. She did not doubt very long as to her own action, but turned suddenly, put her arms round the other's neck and kissed her.

"And yet you could come here?" asked Avisa. But Ruth, ignorant of the connecting links in Mrs. Pomeroy's mind, supposed this question related to the speaker herself and her past adverse opinion.

"I could. I'd have come across the world to you."

"Ruth," she answered; "you've told me what I'd rather have heard than anything human speech could utter, but one thing. Ruth, you love Ives and 'tis the most blessed thought to me that you love him. Go on loving him, for God's sake! Never stop loving him; be patient; be true and leave the rest to—not to me—but to the Lord. Oh, woman, he's good—better than you know. There's a power

of right thinking growing up in him, and a love of justice and worship of his mother. From you much may be hid, but not from me. He's a big-hearted man, and life's teaching him a lot of precious things. He's done brave deeds that only I know about, and—and—go on loving him, Ruth. My love has been rewarded above my highest hopes and prayers. . . . Yours. . . . But I'm selfish. . . . 'Tis beautiful of you to love him, Ruth—to love him so secret and so steadfast despite all that life tempts you with. 'Tis beautiful, and only my own Ruth would rise to it. . . ."

The girl did not answer. She was crying, half in shame, half in joy.

"Forgive me," she said at last. "I oughtn't to have come here, but you called, and my heart and duty seemed to jump together. Don't fear about it. I've let it out to you, like a fool; but he'll never know. Trust me for that."

"He's growing wiser and wiser, Ruth. Twice a day I pray that he'll grow wise enough to offer you marriage afore I die. But if he don't, I'll still die happy, even if 'tis a very selfish happiness, because you've told me this."

They kissed each other again, and Ruth disappeared at the sound of Ives approaching. He came in moody and out of temper, and his darkness clouded the happiness of Avisa's spirit. She turned her mind swiftly to his, stilled the joyful throb of hope, sat beside her son with folded hands, and listened to the circumstances that had tried him.

"You'm glum, dear heart," she said. "I haven't seen that darkness on your brow these many days."

"Because you haven't sought it, mother. Yes, I'm glum, and there's enough to make me so. If a man has prided himself on being a man and he breaks down and sinks away from manliness, 'tis enough to make him glum.

A cur—a coward—— I was trying to forget it; but—to-night—I met one—I met two—as made me remember it cruel sharp."

"Eat a bit while you tell me."

He began his supper, and ate and drank for some time without more words. Then he put down his empty mug abruptly and spoke.

"I came face to face with her this afternoon—in a spot without any eye to mark us. I felt I had a right to know if she'd seen the sense of my letter, not to mention its inner meaning. I felt I had a right to know if she wanted to hear any more. I've always hungered to tell her the truth about why I did it, and let her know her infernal selfishness wasn't hid from me. So I spoke straight and bade her 'good-afternoon' quite civil. Then I said, if 'twas all the same to her, I'd like to have a five minutes' tell with her."

"I can guess the rest," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"I'll swear you can't: nobody alive could."

"She didn't heed; she didn't speak; she just went by."

"You're right, by God! She looked through me at the Moor, as if I were a pane of glass. Not a tremble, not a wink of her eyelashes. By she went with a cloam pitcher of water, and t'other arm stretched out to balance the weight. 'Twas the vilest moment of my life, and always will be. I could cut my throat for pride to think that I've made my name stink in any woman's nostrils so! Cut me, with such a scorn as I never dreamed of; and the mark of her loathing in her screwed up nose—as if something was dead and she'd just got a whiff of it. Hell and fury! I'll strangle her if ever she goes by me like that again!"

They talked far into that night, and presently Ives began to smoke. The circumstance brought his mother's mind round to Ruth again, because among the presents received by Ives on his last birthday, was a little match-

box from her hand. This trifle Avisa remembered, and now she marked that her son carried it.

Mrs. Pomeroy made no mention of Ruth that night, or that week, although the girl was hot in her heart. She delayed until a fitting moment. But, meantime, the grandmother of Ives, coming to certain conclusions without assistance, actually did the thing Avisa delayed to do, and challenged the man bluntly and strongly on the subject of Ruth. Indeed, she went much further than her daughter-in-law would have dreamed of going; and the result was very far from successful.

They were alone together and Ives, putting his hand into his pocket, was reminded of a circumstance by something he found there. With an exclamation of contempt he drew forth a little pamphlet of a few pages. On the outside was a picture of a moon-faced youth, who wore large whiskers and stared upon the spectator. At his right an angel, wearing a white robe and large wings, pointed up a steep hill on the summit of which stood a cross; at his left a black fiend, all claws and tail, appeared and directed the young man's attention to a lake on which a boat rode at anchor. A seductive young woman with her hair down sat languidly in the stern of the vessel and waited to see what course the pilgrim would take.

Ives flung his tract across the table to old Jane, who put on her glasses, examined it and read the text beneath the picture:

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word."

"One of them methody things. Did you pick it up?" she asked.

"'Pick it up!' No. A man gived it to me. And who d'you think 'twas? But you'll not guess. Going through Merivale a bit ago, Sammy Bolt stopped me and asked for a favour of a word. Then he said, 'Will you be so very kind as to promise to do me a service, Mr.

Pomeroy?' Of course I said I would if I could. Then he pops this twaddle into my hand. 'You've promised,' he said. 'And I hope you'll keep your word. All I want for you to do is to read every syllable of that message.' With that he made off so fast as his legs could carry him."

"You promised, so you'll have to read it."

"I might say 'damn the cheek of the man,' but coming from the source 'tis rather funny—for private reasons. In fact, a good bit funnier than Bolt himself knows."

"Nothing funny about it. He'm like a good few others that would do you a service and willingly, if you'd but let 'em. Never was such a man as you for getting between hisself and the light. Come in the garden out of earshot and give me your arm. I want to talk to you."

He rose.

"Talk," he said; "what's the good of talking? There's only one subject and only one person I care about in this world now; and that's mother."

"Well, let's talk about her then. You want to make her happy, don't you? And the happier she is, the better her health's like to grow, for doctor specially said she must be peaceful and calm and do no work and have nothing to fret her."

"What more can I do? I've let it be known that if anybody frets her, by so much as a hair, I'll be the death of 'em."

"You might do a bit more, notwithstanding. You know what your mother thinks of Ruth Rendle."

"Quite right, too. Ruth's a Godsend here."

"A proper li'l fairy in the house, I call her."

"All that—so good as that fat, white angel on poor Sammy's tract. But I don't like angels myself—got no use for 'em. I lay the girl waiting in the boat be better company."

"Don't talk so. You know t'would grieve her—your

mother. I tell you—there 'tis—how can I put it afore you —you so blind and deaf as you are!"

"You mean Ruth Rendle, and you want me to marry her? Well, I'm off all that for evermore, grandmother. I hate all the women now as much as I used to like 'em. Once bit twice shy. I'll keep clear of them henceforth. You can't plan these things. I've got a great respect for Ruth, because she don't know enough about men to get to flout 'em and scorn 'em yet. Anyway, I'd wish her a better husband than the likes of me. She's good and straight. She's learnt a lot from mother."

"You'll never get a better; you'll——"

He began to grow violent and use evil language.

"Stop it!" he said. "How can you be so damned selfish—to the girl? Like enough Ruth hates the sight of me and well she may. I won't hear no more of this from anybody. Another syllable and—and I'll get out of it and not come back."

"Go, and kill your mother by going—that's a clever thought."

Ives stormed for ten minutes, then he went off. When he returned later, the old woman had gone to bed and he spent the evening with Avisa and Ruth. He made the latter read Samuel's tract aloud and he watched her face while she did so. She had some beauties that he had not marked. Her hands were pretty, and if her lips did not bud into one of those delicious mouths that cry for kisses, yet they were red and ripe. Her voice was soft and clear also.

The women chid Ives when he scoffed at the sermon, but, for once, his mother seemed less bright and swift of mind than usual. Guessing that she suffered, her son made her go to bed, and when she had gone, he talked with Ruth a little and tried to get a glimpse of her heart. But he failed. She had long grown accustomed to his presence and could bear herself with perfect self-control

before him. Life under the same roof with him taught her a great deal more concerning his moods, failings, and virtues than she had ever known. It helped her to understand him, but it did not in the least hinder her from loving him.

She spoke now of his mother and could not find it in her to echo his hopes for the future. Then, marking that she did not agree with him, Ives went to the opposite pole and became pessimistic.

"I try to hide what I think," he said, "and take a cheerful view; but don't suppose I don't really know all that you know and much more, too. She can't hide anything from me. I know her far better than anybody else in the world knows her. And I always have done so. No nature in her now, the darling dear. Always finger-cold on the warmest day, and her face do seem yellow to me instead of the nut-brown it used to be. I see it—I see it all sharper and deeper far than any of you women."

She consoled him and grew hopeful in her turn. She spoke of little incidents to show the mother's vitality and energy were still strong; but he would none of them.

"Such things she does for love of her kind and by great, terrible efforts. You see the things done, but only I know what goes to 'em. Her bravery keeps her going, and her bravery will keep her living; but it can't support the strength of the body. She's fading out."

Three days later, as if to prove Pomeroy in the right, there came cold news that Avisa could not rise. She had not slept and felt it would be better to stop in bed until midday.

Ives rushed up at once, and having seen her haggard face, departed to Tavistock for a doctor.

"'Tis the beginning of the end," said Jane to Emanuel Codd, when he had ridden off. "Her light be burning low and when it starts to flicker, 'tis only a question of time how long afore 'tis gone."

"And my pension never settled," he answered. "It ought to have been done years ago; but there's terrible poor hopes for me if I'm to lie at his mercy."

"She forgets nought; even in her hours of little ease she's always calling home somebody," replied Jane. "You'm thought upon long ago, I expect."

Ives returned with the physician and waited impatiently for an hour until he heard the truth. Then he learned that his mother might live till Christmas, or even into another year. But her end was at hand.

"She knows it," said the doctor kindly; "and she knows the time better than I do, for she can judge her own reserves of strength in a remarkable manner. She is calm and content. I've made everything clear to the young woman upstairs, and your mother will not suffer again as she suffered last night. I'll send a nurse this evening and come myself next week."

Pomeroy did not go to Avisa then, but took his horrified heart with him to the Moor, when a lifeless and sodden hour in late October brooded over fitting theatres for grief. Heavy concourse of vapour smothered the high points of the land and emptied secret cisterns upon the peaks and ridges of the mountains. From the tors ran down much water to the valleys; earth was drenched with the libations of the hills, and all the grey world wept.

CHAPTER XXVII

WANING LIGHT

Avisa Pomeroy still rose and descended to the house-place when her strength permitted it; but these occasions grew rarer, and presently ceased. A nurse assisted Ruth, and since the mother could no longer move among her people, the life of the farm came to see her, and still revolved about her sinking fires.

Once Jane Pomeroy sat with her daughter-in-law, and told her a story. It happened that Ives was also beside the invalid at the time. This fact, however, did not hold his grandmother's tongue, for she was not sorry that he should hear what she had to say.

"I was along with Rachel Bolt having a tell last night on the way from Sampford Spiney," she said, "and the bitter ancient creature was speaking things that wouldn't have been over pleasant for your ears—either of you."

"You oughtn't to heed an old soft-head like that. Who tells her anything?" asked Ives.

"Her son and her son's wife; and 'twas Jill, I believe, as she'd got this from. My word, but there's an edge to it! They are saying you and that big girl what teaches at Princetown school . . . She'd got chapter and verse for it, and 'twas rumoured that you'd been teaching her and that—somebody—I forgot the man's name—be going to lie behind a hedge for you, Ives Pomeroy."

"I'll have this cleared up in double quick time!" said the man.

His mother smiled and shook her head.

"You'm past that stage. A false bit of she-news like this isn't going to make you hot," she declared positively.

"No man ever says such foolish things as that—only silly women. Take no notice of it."

"And let myself be judged by her lies!"

"Lies do fly," she answered, "and truth only crawls most times; but this is a lie without wings."

He took the incident ill, however, and, indeed, at this period of his career, the young man terribly tried all those with whom he had to deal. He was surly, morose, and utterly absorbed in his own supreme miseries. As the time for his mother's departure grew nearer, his anguish increased, and many feared to approach or address him. He kept much apart, when not with Avisa, and he wandered far afield. His thoughts led him to the inevitable loneliness so close at hand, and he debated of his own life when she should be gone out of it. Then he cursed himself for such deep selfishness, and asked himself how he could think of life at all without her. Of late years she had grown to be a large part of his life. He turned to her more and more as he grew older; he proved again and again that she was ever on the side of wisdom and justice.

Christmas approached and the folk began to regard any chance sight of Avisa Pomeroy as the last. Most of those who knew her sought opportunity to see her once again and speak with her; but the person she herself sought, refused to come. Lizzie and her husband arrived at Christmas and, without the knowledge of Ives, his mother sent a private message to the younger Mrs. Bolt by Lizzie. She begged that Jill would call to see her; but Samuel's wife declined the invitation cautiously.

"You can tell your mother that I'm not coming. I mind very well that she was kind and useful to me in small things; but I've got nothing to say to her; and what she've got to say to me I'll take as said."

After this speech Jill thought a few more words; but she did not utter them. In her mind she reflected that

those laugh best who laugh last. She continued to ignore Ives, and enjoyed to pass him as though unconscious of his presence; but she guessed, Avisa once gone, that it might be possible if she pleased again to waken his slumbering fires. Herein, however, she largely erred. The man was not destined ever more to desire her; and his mother knew it. Lizzie delivered Jill's message, which was a mystery from her point of view, and Avisa regretted the fruitless errand, but assured her daughter that this answer caused her no surprise. The sick woman's fading thoughts only concerned her son, and she did not guess the difficult problems that he presented to the rest of the household when beyond earshot of her room.

Arthur Brown especially provoked Ives, and the latter, now unhinged somewhat and more than usually dead to reason and patience, often found his brother-in-law's reflections and comments on the situation to be more than he could bear. Brown's principles were quite equal to the strain, and his complacent and magisterial calm awoke explosion after explosion, though no sound of these eruptions reached Avisa.

There came a day, early in the new year, when Lizzie broke down and wept before the company at dinner.

"You are too much in the house, my dear," said Arthur. "This afternoon I must ask you to come for a short stroll with me, to take the air and fortify your nerves."

Her husband never spoke twice to Lizzie, and presently, drying her eyes, she walked out with him. The day was cold and the Moor stretched sleeping round about them. A light wind shrilled in the dead heath bells; the sky beetled black and low, but the air was very clear beneath it. Day died slowly and no flame of sunset woke the west upon that eventide. They passed along upwards and presently reached the Windystone and the stream that crept beside it. A sort of suspended life inhabited all things

and marked even the running water. The world rolled somnolent and drowsy on the edge of hibernation.

Mr. Brown found a sheltered spot, and sat down with his face to the cross; while Lizzie took a seat beside him.

"It is most necessary that those who nurse the sick should themselves keep in rude health," said her husband. "You must consider that and not allow your natural and proper love for a good mother to blind you to the laws of physical health. Ives also has to be reckoned with. I pray, after the sad event is a thing of the past, that he may become more reasonable and more Christian; for the moment, accustomed as I am to lifting and enlarging immature intellects, I must own myself defeated. It has always been so: I have never succeeded in penetrating his natural stubbornness of perception. And I have regretted it as you are aware, Lizzie."

"God knows what'll become of him when mother dies."

"Exactly, God knows. We have that inestimable certainty. Though the future may look grave from our standpoint. . . ."

"But what will happen? What will he do?" she cried out.

Arthur was gently annoyed.

"You interrupted me: that is not like you, Lizzie."

She revealed a sort of helplessness of mind and body. He said no more for some moments; but suddenly he caught sight of a little, ragged, brown colt that rubbed its flank against the old cross.

"Youth and age—the newborn creature and the venerable monument——" he began. Then he paused to collect illuminating thoughts upon this theme. His wife, however, spoke and asked a question.

"D'you think I ought to stop with him for a while—after? Of course Ruth can't."

"I have already considered the point," he answered. "I have decided that you stop with him exactly one

fortnight after the decease—no more and no less. I shall permit that; indeed, I wish it. The vacation ends four days hence and I, of course, return to my duties. You will stop and close your mother's eyes, just as I did for my own good mother. And, from the date of the interment, you will remain fourteen days with your poor brother."

"It is very, very good of you, Arthur, to let me."

He did not contradict her. The pony had gone and Mr. Brown abandoned the subject of youth and age. Instead he preached of the pitfalls of youth in general; ran lightly over the seven deadly sins; traced their main arteries in the human mind, and confessed that none of them, in all their protean and most attractive shapes, had so much as tempted him to the slightest experiment.

"Perhaps, if I have a besetting weakness, Lizzie, it is intellectual pride," he admitted. "You will remember that I was accused of it. But for my part, I cannot feel my conscience charges me with such a thing."

"You've got wonderful self-respect, Arthur."

"Thank you, Lizzie; that is certainly a prettier, and, in my case, a truer word. Self-respect woke very early in me."

"Your good conduct prizes when you was a boy show that."

"Yes; and now I try to preserve self-respect with poor Ives. Of course nothing is harder than to keep it when arguing with somebody who doesn't know the meaning of the word. Still one must go on treating him as a grown-up child and striving to be hopeful."

"His tenderness with mother is beautiful, Arthur. She'd rather have him touch her than the nurse."

"Maternal instinct, Lizzie. She thinks a great deal about him, even when I am discussing other matters with her."

"He can't look forward. He can't look back. He's terrible."

"I detect indications of remorse. In itself remorse would be a healthy mark of progress. But it appears to make him so exceedingly short-tempered. That may be an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace—I say it *may* be."

"There is Ives," said Lizzie. "He's been riding to Tavistock and come back by this way. He goes down for nice things, and poor mother tries terrible hard to eat 'em."

"Don't clip your words, love—remember."

"I'm sorry, Arthur, but I seldom slip now. She tries, but it's cruel kindness, if he only knew it."

Ives saw them and showed no inclination to join them. He was walking his horse and Lizzie called to him to stop. They approached him then and all returned together. The young man carried a few parcels.

"I got some black grapes—best berries in Tavistock," he said. "You must make her eat a few, Lizzie. They'll freshen her up, maybe."

"I shouldn't force her, however, if I may advise," said the schoolmaster. "Nature tells the sufferer——"

"Who wants to force her? Black grapes are the proper thing for sick people, and they always cry out for 'em in general. Very like she's longing for 'em, only wouldn't ask."

They kept silence for some time until, beside a hedge, where the naked blackthorns were brushed with ripe fruit, Mr. Brown spoke again.

"A pity to see this harvest of the hedgerow neglected," he remarked. "Sloes—the fruit of prunus spinosa—make an excellent cordial; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that an excellent cordial may be made from them."

Ives uttered a sound of intense exasperation.

"Oh, hell!" he said. "I can't stand much more of you, Arthur. When do you go back to teach the chil-

dren? Thank the Lord I was born too early for you to teach me."

"I wish I could teach you, Ives," answered his brother-in-law. "But life's the only schoolmaster will ever get anything into your head, I'm afraid."

"Don't fear: you're doing your share, too. You're part of life and you're teaching me a trifle here and there: teaching me to be patient and meek as Moses—teaching me—oh, a deuce of a lot of things not worth knowing."

"I wish I could make you forget one or two things also, Ives."

"Wish you could with all my heart. You'll make me forget how to laugh afore long; though 'tis a lot else beside you be doing that."

"Little enough to laugh at in the world, certainly."

"Little that's pleasant; so them as must laugh will have to fall back upon what ban't—such things as you for instance."

"Nobody but a fool laughs at a wise man."

"But I reckon all men may laugh at anybody who thinks himself wise, and calls himself wise. There's a rod in pickle for all you perfect chaps. We'll live to see you come a mucker yet, Arthur—if the devil thinks you worth tempting, which I doubt."

With this prophecy Ives left them and rode forward. For once, Brown had put him into a good temper, for Pomeroy was conscious of having beaten his brother-in-law in argument. He returned home, therefore, in a spirit more amiable than usual.

It remained for Emanuel Codd to allay this humour, beget irritation, and fret the current of Pomeroy's mind into its accustomed cross sea. Mr. Codd watched his mistress sink with mingled emotions. She was perhaps the only human being—certainly the only woman—he respected in the world; but his jealousy woke at the spectacle of such universal sorrow. He cheapened this far-flung

grief and tried to explain it away. Chance made him essay this task even before Ives, and the result was another disaster.

They spoke together as Ives dismounted, for Codd was in the stable at the time. First the old man sneered at life in general and what he conceived to be the empty truth concerning all human hearts. Thus far his master quite agreed with him. But then Codd, moved by a restless demon to annoy the younger man, turned upon him, and took him as the staring example of much to be avoided.

"You'm so bad as the rest," he said, "for all you think you're not. Your memory be no stronger than another's, and often and often you do the very thing you chide me or Johnson for doing. D'you think I don't see the truth of people? 'Tis out of sight, out of mind with you when a few years be past. You thought you was only living for that wife of Bolt's a bit ago; but how is it now? Why, you'm a darned sight more interested in your sheepdog."

"Better mind your own business."

"Ah! Truth bites, don't it? But even truth's self is hollow and empty—like the carriages that a few of the quality will send to walk after your mother when she goes down to the grave. Empty coaches in a row—sent to honour their owners, not the clay in the coffin; and because 'twill make the neighbours think better of their owners, not the dead. Her in her grave won't know—she——"

"You adder!—always the same—always fattening on other folks' grief! A poisonous plague that you are!"

"Go on—pour out your cruel spite against me and truth. We can bear it."

"Truth don't want your filthy friendship," said Ives. Then he found Mr. Cawker and his daughter waiting in the kitchen. They poured some balm upon his soul, for

they belonged more to his own spiritual race than either Emanuel or the schoolmaster.

Moleskin had brought a brace of golden plover.

"We've ventured to ax if the missis can see us for a few seconds," he said. "From all accounts it may be the last time, and 'twill be good to know to our own dying hour we've paid that great woman a bit of respect. Can she let down food still? These here beauties was killed yesterday."

"Thank you for coming."

"And, if you please, I'd like to say how I—I dearly like Mrs. Pomeroy, if I may make so bold. And my mother sends respectful words; and she prays to meet Mrs. Pomeroy on the golden shore afore long, Mr. Ives."

"Her soul shines through your mother's body, same as the moon through a ghost," said Moleskin. "'Twas always so with her. A fool can read such goodness. 'Tis the very writing of God on the forehead—like the light that broke out on the face of Moses. 'Tis a great addition to life to have known her."

"And I love her, Mr. Ives, because she seed so lightning quick that Rupert Johnson was getting addicted to me, and let him walk home with me."

Ives nodded.

"'Tis all true," he said. "You and this here woman"—he pointed to Ruth, who had just entered—"you three people; and myself, and another here and there; be the only ones who really understand all that my mother is. Never was such another, and never will be."

"The birds be shot under a license, I must tell you," added Moleskin. "It wasn't very likely that I should have brought her any other sort at such a time, not to mention the fact that I'm holding on like grim death to righteousness still—birds or no birds."

"Mrs. Pomeroy would like to see you both now, Mr. Cawker," said Ruth.

One by one the friends and closer acquaintances of her

life took leave of Avisa: then came a Saturday when her son-in-law beheld her alive for the last time.

She was unusually well upon this forenoon, and those she best loved assembled beside her and listened to her speeches. Her thoughts turned a good deal upon the past, and she gave her children glimpses of her husband and their own childhood that interested them very deeply.

"How quickly it has run away—my life!" she said. "Like water after rain, like a stream in the sand. Seems but yesterday I was a little maid to school. Then comed the wonder of courting, and falling in love and losing. Awful my time looked when your father died—awfully long and awfully empty. Such a cruel weight of years for one poor widow's back it seemed. But here's the end of 'em—slipped away like a dream—and I'll be seeing him again long afore sheep-shearing."

"You'll mind all the messages, won't 'e, dear?" said old Mrs. Pomeroy. "Don't like to trouble you with a lot of things on such a journey as you be going to take yet—just my word to him——"

"Don't you fear I'll forget it, mother."

"You was a very proper wife to him always, Avisa, and his life was the better and happier by you. That's a great blessing for you to remember."

"I brought laughter to him," said the mother. "'Tis a good thing in its way. 'No man married to my wife could take hisself too serious.' Often he said them very words."

"And true words," answered Jane. "Not that he ever did value himself over much, even in his youth. A modest man, much given to hanging back, he was; and if you made him laugh at himself one day, you'd waken in his heart a higher conceit of hisself the next. You was one of them women who can bring out the flavour of a man if you love him. A great fellow-feeler you, Avisa. All manner of people have found that out."

"Think of all the folk that dearly loved to come over here for a tell with you, mother," said Lizzie.

Ives spoke not, but he listened intently.

Long afterwards he remembered the chance latter utterances of his mother and strung them together in his mind. To him they were a thread of precious gems, each the bright home of a memory. The last thoughts of Avisa's feeling brain seemed sacred things to him. He treasured them and never forgot them.

On this occasion she spoke of Mr. Joel Toop, after her son had grumbled about him.

"'Twas always the same: full of proper qualities, but no general largeness of mind to go along with them, good man."

"Won't praise a cabbage in a neighbour's garden; but always expects people to make no end of fuss when they see his," said Ives.

"There's a lot like that: they shut one eye when they look at other people's good things—to make 'em seem smaller," she answered.

Presently Arthur Brown read the Bible to her while the rest listened, and Ives well remembered his grandmother's horror and the schoolmaster's uneasiness at Avisa's comments on a certain scene. Arthur rehearsed a chapter from Kings that told of Elisha, the rude little boys and the beasts:

"And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them," he concluded with a sigh.

"'Twas a wonder some of they poor, frantic mothers didn't tear the prophet," said Avisa Pomeroy. As she spoke, the faint humorous image of her old self shone in her eyes a moment, like after-glow of sunset.

None saw her actual leave-taking of Mr. Brown, for she sent them out while she bade him farewell.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON THE WINGS OF THE MORNING

Now Avisa Pomeroy constantly planned to have her son and Ruth beside her. She sank into lengthened silences at the turn of the new year, and the old swift play of her mind grew slower. Ives often read aloud; and while he did so, his mother's eyes alone moved as she turned them from her son to Ruth, from the young woman back again to Ives. It seemed as though her fading glances sought to spin a bond between them and played, like a shuttle back and forth, to entangle these two hearts in one net of love. But grief reigned over both, and close linked though they were through these days by circumstance, it was a shared sorrow and love of another, not joy and a mutual love that drew Ruth and Ives into present harmony.

Avisa saw each of those who had entered into her life and took farewell of many humble men and women. The folk departed from her with tears, and the strain became intolerable.

She faded slowly. Then the end seemed at hand and Lizzie wrote to her husband in secret and implored him to come down again, if only for a few days. He obliged her and arrived to stop from Saturday until Monday.

Ives received him ungraciously and his coming precipitated some of the frenzy that had slowly gathered head in the younger man's spirit. They sat in the kitchen and Lizzie made tea for her husband, while Arthur described his journey with much worthless detail. Then the schoolmaster turned to Ives and endeavoured to console him.

"Lizzie tells me that your dear mother suffers but little. That is a great blessing, Ives, though of course extreme weakness is in itself a form of suffering. However——"

"You needn't tell me. I know everything about her—far more than anybody else. She's all right; she's coming to her own and 'twill soon tax her God to think of things good enough for her."

"A good and pious woman, and a noble mother for you to remember, my dear fellow."

Ives pursued his own thoughts aloud. There was great anguish in his eyes as he spoke to Lizzie.

"'Tis all one to the lamp when it goes out—but them that be left—the darkness. . . . But us—us that walked by the light of her—and must go blind evermore. . . . 'Tis us that be struck to death—not her. Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie, and me a bad son—a bad son I've been to her. That's the heart of this trouble for me. That precious mother to have such dross for a son!"

"Don't think so, dear Ives. She's been proud of you all your life, and she often tells over the good things you've done for love of her and—and—the good things you be going to do."

"Her work's done," he said. "Her wonderful, beautiful deeds be all ended now, and she've led a better life than any born woman did afore. She've done with the business of being alive. 'Twas worth while to the earth her being alive. The whole world's better for it. But us poor, helpless, useless things—what's going to hap to us now?"

He went out from them after asking the question and his sister wept, but not all for grief.

"'Tis good he feels it so cruel," she sobbed. "My heart aches for him, and yet—and yet 'tis well he should be struck so hard."

"I hope so, Lizzie. Indeed, I think so, too. These are good signs and I suppose we must not mind that in his misery he confuses other people with himself, and tries to make us all share in his weakness and past wrongdoing. We are not helpless, useless things, thank God,

whatever he may have been. Perhaps, if he is spared, Ives will live to see that I—however, this dismay on his part is a sign of grace certainly, and I forgive him, as I always do, for being rather silly and illogical in his grief. At times of grief you may notice that a man's real character comes out. If he would like to stop with us presently, to enjoy our society and see your new home, I shall have no objection."

"You are so wonderfully patient with dear Ives," she said.

Avisa sank slowly into unconsciousness, and her mind, withdrawn from the present, wandered alone through the shadowy avenues of the past. There now she dwelt, and, by the windows of words, those who watched her sometimes dimly perceived her hidden course and gained glimpses of her maiden days, her love time, her motherhood, and the hours of her bereavement. Once there sat with her Ruth and Ives, and her son fancied, from a smile that woke upon her face, that she knew him; but it was not so. She tightened her hand on his, no more.

As usual now, she spoke at intervals, but did not know that she spoke.

"Bear up, father," she said. "Our poor baby be happy as a songbird now, and heaven her school instead of earth. She'll know—she'll know and count the days till her mother and father come up along to her. Us'll meet her up-along. I had a fore-token she was going far away. And yet not far neither; for heaven be very home-by earth. Us do live close—close to them we love—maybe closer to the dead ones than the living, if faith's strong enough. They dear spirits can count the beating of our poor hearts if they will. . . ."

Presently she laughed and her joy was terrible to bear.

"Look, father, there comes the boy! So sturdy and strong he goeth on his legs! Do 'e see his little flea-

coloured coat, as I've made out of that old blanket? 'Twill do bravely when he walks to day-school in winter. . . . Lizzie's your own darter, father; and the boy's mine—mine."

She laughed again.

"What a jakes of a mess they'm both in, poor, dear, li'l pigs! Palstring through the mud they've been. . . ."

Her hands worked at the bed-clothes, and creased and creased tirelessly.

"No, no, no, no, . . . never that! I'd see him dead sooner. . . . A good end, mother. You son died like he lived. I do envy you, old mother, for your journey back to him is like to be far shorter than mine. . . ."

Jane Pomeroy entered a moment later and Ives spoke to her.

"Pity you didn't come in a minute sooner," he said. "Your name was on her lips a minute agone. My father had just died and she was saying as you'd see him again before her."

"And well she might think so. Look! Do 'e mark the pattern her hands have pinched in the counterpane? That's the fold of the dying—she's at her end."

Twelve hours later the men were called at earliest day and hastened up to find a leaden and reluctant dawn struggling with the red-candle light. A change had happened when the morning wind awoke, and dayspring came as a messenger to Avisa Pomeroy.

She was conscious but dumb, and she desired in vain to speak with Ives. For a full hour he knelt beside his mother with his right arm gripped round her. Those of her household were also about her, but she and the man were only conscious each of the other's presence. People came and went, whispered and wept and watched. Then, when one might say that day had broken, Avisa relaxed suddenly upon her son's shoulder, turned her face

to him in pain and so sank to everlasting silence with his lips upon her cheek.

Long he sustained her and would not yield her up; because to him it seemed that the clay in his arms held some faint fragrance still of his mother's vanished soul.

BOOK III

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PROBLEM

A MAN'S inheritance may be roughly appraised under three heads: his pre-historic heredity; his posterior heredity, or parentage; and the environment into which chance throws him. To the first belong those common qualities transmitted to all men from their remote ancestry in the palæolithic past; and, concerning Ives Pomeroy, it remained to be seen whether this anterior heritage was the "corpse in the cargo" destined to foul all and bring his life's history to ruin. Against it might be set the blood in his veins, and the companionship of his mother, who for eight-and-twenty years had been the ægis of his existence and the moral stimulant of his environment. It must yet appear whether her part in him would prove antiseptic enough to conquer and subdue that primal endowment unthinking persons charged upon Ives himself and blamed him for—those qualities antisocial and even brutal which belonged in full measure to him. By thousands of years the child is nearer than the man to his first direct ancestors; and thus it happened that this man, still largely a child in many directions, revealed familiar qualities usually masked or subdued at his age. He represented a very abrupt variation from his stock, and was the most original Pomeroy the recent race recorded. His originality, indeed, might end the race altogether, for such a variation was not calculated to advance his welfare or prosper his progeny.

The time had come when a single-handed life's struggle must seriously begin; and those who knew him best regarded his future with the least hope. Peter Toop voiced general opinion in a picturesque phrase:

"Only his mother's ghost would ever keep that man straight," he said.

But it was a deeper saying that he knew or those guessed who heard it; because, in a sense most vital, the world is very full of gracious and grim ghosts—spectres malignant or benign—that hover over human life, like the after-glow of sunsets or the baleful fringes of a thundercloud. They create a blessed atmosphere higher and sweeter than that possible to any physical or psychic presence; they control or destroy after a fashion above the strength of men and beyond the ambition of devils. From within these prodigious forces work, and their powers depend upon secret and subtle foundations as yet beyond human ken to probe and test. They breed the Time Spirit; they indicate the road ahead. From the battle of natures adverse, victory steadily sets in on the side of the social, and out of suffering and suppression for society's enemies, there springs the welfare and advance of humanity's friends. Evolution purifies heredity, and it is only the irrational attitude of man that retards a swifter progress.

Pomeroy's neighbours gravely doubted for him; only his mother herself had died without doubt. In his heart it sometimes shone for a steadfast beacon, that she had trusted him. He remembered the failing tones of her voice and the flicker of strength that came into them when she spoke of his future.

But man is not like a chain—only as strong as his weakest point. The lines of his least resistance will sometimes be strangely and unexpectedly barred; the bulwarks of his greatest strength will sometimes perish of a secret rot. There is no absolute certainty or stability in character. Our greatness and our littleness are welded together, and

a leaven unsuspected may develop at any age before the climacteric to sweeten or vitiate the whole. Out of pettiness may spring our salvation; out of greatness our ruin shall often be traced. And again, our greatness may save us, since the lightning does not strike all who challenge it; or some constituent of pettiness suddenly generated in the crucible of life, may destroy us and prove the transmitted poison. Men have indeed risen from the dust to higher things when the transmitted seed within has found place, season and climate to germinate and thrive; but they have descended from higher things as often; because a waiting seed of another sort has suddenly found an inner dung-heap hot and ready wherein to flourish and bring forth. It is never too late to mend or to mar, so long as man is virile and his physical and mental life are healthy and open to impression. Thus the environment is as vital as the inherited instinct and will help mightily to promote or retard both the precious and the vile germs stored within all creatures. Yet, since human environment is daily bettered, the spirit of the hour may well be one of hope. We have not so far learned to live for the unborn, but Nature invariably does so, and men cannot wreck the future of man. We are saved from ourselves by the Law.

Ives Pomeroy belonged to the order of fighters and he manifested an acute and ill-regulated sense of justice, founded on instinct rather than intelligence. Avisa had built her hopes upon it and upon her knowledge of her own young self; but whether now the man's environment and circumstances would breed new stuff of the soul and dull the better part in him, or serve to improve it, none could know. All foretold catastrophe and watched him with uneasy and unhopeful eyes as he still stood in spirit on the brink of his mother's grave.

The problem was simple and easily stated. What, first, would be the lessening power of Avisa's self from the pit, as time performed its inevitable work of attrition upon

memory? And what, in the second place, would be the increasing power of her motherhood in his head and heart during the process of his mental development and general growth? Lastly, how would the lot in life to which fate called him affect the situation?

It is to be remembered that as man does not inherit disease, but the constitution or diathesis favourable or inimical to it; so we may not affirm that good or evil possibilities of mind are transmitted save potentially. They depend for their sequence on circumstances often beyond human power to gauge. Good or evil alike abort or miscarry; and to sow the wind is not with certainty to reap the whirlwind. Environment to the nurture of character is what food may be to a plant: it cannot alter intrinsic attributes, but it can develop or dwarf, encourage or deaden, incite or restrain.

Ives Pomeroy went through his mother's papers and found among them not a few evidences of her thought for the future. Everything was in order; she left all power to her son, and the knowledge that she had done so rejoiced him, because it spoke of her large trust. Among certain annuities was one for Emanuel Codd when he finally thought proper to stop work; but the amount had been left for Ives to determine, and while Emanuel took a black view of this circumstance, his master rejoiced at it.

"She understood me," he said. "You're safe enough in my hands. I know what she thought of you, Codd. You needn't put on that hang-dog look."

The old man growled and said something that Ives could not hear.

"I should like to know what the figure is to be, if it's all the same to you," he added.

"Plenty of time, plenty of time," answered Pomeroy. "You're not going yet a while."

But Emanuel had no intention to stop. There were

changes in the air and, like the rest of the household, he found Vixen Tor Farm a naked, mournful and twilit place now that the mother's sun had set. Ruth Rendle for the present went back to her cousins, and Peter was very glad to receive her, and Joel was not. A servant had to be engaged at the farm, and for the rest, old Mrs. Pomeroy surprised herself and everybody else by a great access of energy. She ceased to be an invalid and strove with much courage to take the place of her daughter-in-law. She pleased herself and nobody else. Ives openly deplored this sudden display of energy, and begged his grandmother to be more restful; but she grew excited at her own rejuvenescence and insisted on controlling the inner life and order of the farm.

Lizzie stopped with her brother for the time that Arthur Brown had promised. Then she returned home and spoke hopefully of Ives and his altered attitude to life. She declared that he had become more solemn and more thoughtful. He was much alone; he was easier to manage; his grief had aged him a great deal; but he was very helpless in many minor particulars.

"Does he allude in his conversation to Miss Rendle?" Arthur asked.

"No; she went, and he said 'good-bye' without anything much in his voice. He said it before me, as though it was nothing. All the same he saw her again the next day and took her dear mother's beautiful inlaid desk for a keepsake."

Mr. Brown was gently annoyed.

"You ought to have had that. You ought to have insisted, Lizzie."

"It was left in the will for Ruth."

"Then, of course, I say nothing; still——"

"Dear mother left me her watch and chain and—the money.".

"Far be it from me to criticise the dead, Lizzie. You

will remember that when I heard what we—well, I said nothing."

"You were disappointed."

"I may have been; but all was just—from a woman's point of view. Justice is a condition of the mind very rarely to be met with in the female sex. However, we were talking about your brother. There is no doubt that Mrs. Pomeroy much wished to arrange a match between Ives and Miss Rendle. But these things never happen. In fact, with a man of the stamp of Ives, nothing ever happens but the unexpected."

"He was very grateful to her and I was wrong when I said he never spoke of her. I forgot he once told me that if I had as much brains in my head as Ruth had in her little finger, it would be a blessing. But that was before mother died. He's soft and kind now. I think if you was to ask him——"

"If I *were* to ask him, Lizzie."

"I think he'd come to us for Christmas, Arthur."

"We will see, my dear; we will see. The rites of hospitality——"

He proceeded, but her thoughts were with her brother, and Arthur was presently irritated to perceive that his wife had heard nothing concerning the rites of hospitality. She pictured Ives all day long and her heart ached for him. She prayed to God to send him to Ruth, and she longed, when his rare letters reached her, that they might contain the news of his engagement. Indeed, the man was thinking about Ruth and living over the last days of his mother's life with her. As he retraced them he perceived how large a part of the time Ruth had filled, and accurately guessed at her loyal labours and unceasing devotion of days and nights dedicated to the loved and fading presence. His heart warmed to her often, but he had in it no abiding place for love of woman at this moment. His mother's death grew daily into a thing more desolate and terrible.

It submerged him abruptly at all times and in all places; it drowned his soul suddenly, like a seventh wave. Then he would battle up and out of his grief again and go on living and labouring, and he would forget altogether sometimes for an hour or so, when nature in pity loosed her grip on memory and gave a respite. And then an incident, or a word, or a laugh would bring it all back; he would curse himself for letting his grief slip for a moment. By night dreams revived her bodily shape until he woke and his arms seemed to lift to it; chance words also served to paint her picture so cruelly, so brightly, that the world was but a black curtain stretched behind. If he laughed at some chance happening of life, the laugh always brought her back and stabbed him; in that he could dare to laugh and his mother dust.

He fought the bitter fight that all have fought, and he came very slowly to a rational survey of his future and its duties. For a time he planned to leave Vixen Tor; then he decided not to do so. He knew no other world than this and felt no immediate heart or hunger to seek one.

A month after Avisa's death old Mrs. Bolt came to see Jane Pomeroy, and she brought with her an item of news.

"If Peter Toop haven't over-mastered that girl Ruth and got her to go back in the bar!"

"I wish to God she'd come back here," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"The lady they'd got didn't suit 'em, so it all fitted in very silent and comfortable. And now that chap, Matthew Northmore, may win her yet. He's been after her these years and years, so Samuel's wife tells me."

"I wish 'twas our Ives was going to take her."

"He ought to be married, for certain—time and more than time. And a sensible, steady girl, and dear Avisa thought a lot upon her. She told me once 'twould be, and that God had treated her like Moses and let her get a

glimpse of the Promised Land—meaning Ives married to that maiden."

"She is a girl in a thousand. I only hope Northmore won't snap her up afore Ives gets sense and tries to have her. She'd take him, mind you; and 'twould be a great blessing as my daughter-in-law well knowed."

Mrs. Bolt sighed.

"'Tis a wisht house without her. God knows what you must have suffered. We ancient creatures be left lagging, Jane, and the useful ones are taken. 'Tis a strange way of Providence to leave us, that none wants and——"

But the other old woman interrupted sharply:

"Speak for yourself!" she said. "I ban't left lagging that I know about. I'm so busy and useful an old woman as you'll find in the kingdom, and my grandson could no more do without me than your boy could do without you. And all the eighty-four years what the Lord's given me—I've never wasted an hour of 'em! And that's more than some of us ripe folk can say."

CHAPTER XXX

MR. CODD RECEIVES NOTICE

NIGHT hid the land as Pomeroy returned home from Tavistock. A single lamp burned at the cross roads known as Moor Shop; and above it hung the stars. The man turned now into unfamiliar paths of reflection. He did not follow them far, for abstract thought was largely foreign to his bent; but a wider outlook dawned from experience, and at fitful seasons, as now, when alone and cut off from the world by the accident of night, he used his brains and dimly glimpsed at hidden things and analogies; at unsuspected wrongs within him and without him; at the ways of the world and the profound certainty of all human affairs. His mother's death had aged him and advanced her life's work in his heart. He believed in the religious dogmas she had most steadfastly held, and they quickened for a short season upon her passing; then they abated their force, and now they were hibernating through the winter of his grief. Church-going wearied him for the moment. He seldom went nearer the porch than his mother's grave; and there he stopped and listened to the Sunday humming from within and set every grassblade in its place above the dust of her.

Ives looked at the little oil lamp, and he looked at a bright star that flashed aloft above the distant shoulders of Dartmoor. The higher light marked his way; at the lesser a moth wheeled and worshipped after her manner. And the man, with his mind for a moment empty, considered the case and perceived how a lamp might be a world for one earth-born wanderer, and a world might be a lamp for another. He pitied the moth and he pitied

himself more; because his lamp was out and he went in darkness. The stars were cold. He was trying to do his duty with a lively hope that his mother knew it. He clung to the conviction that she watched and was not in reality so far off as he felt her to be; but life rolled dull and deadly. The soft moth tapped at the lamp and flashed hither and thither a while; then it vanished. Ives went on his way, climbed a great hill under Cock's Tor, hesitated about returning home immediately, and instead kept to the main road and presently descended into Merivale. He had been alone nearly all day and the mood was on him to see men and to see Ruth.

For the time she was back with her cousins and found Peter attentive and agreeable, Joel indifferent. Her position was altered, and the distraction and steady work of the bar proved healthful to her.

Ives made fast his horse and entered *The Jolly Huntsmen.*

A man had preceded him by half a minute, and Moleskin was speaking to Mr. Peter Toop as Ives appeared.

"Just a hair of the dog that bit me, my dear. I was bosky-eyed last night up to Princetown, or, to put it honestly, a little drunk. All over an argument about a married woman! Of course I took her side, bless her, as I always do take the petticoat side in every argument; and I proved my case and showed she was as good as gold. But it took a power of words and made me uncommon thirsty."

Mr. Cawker was supplied as usual, and Ives, having bade the company "good-evening," accosted his old friend.

"What's this about a threat to turn you out of your house?" he said.

"To be frank, it's true. As you know, I've stuck very close to the church now for pretty near on two years, and I've given work a fair chance and turned my hand to twenty honest trades; but for some high reason hidden

from human eyes, matters have falled out criss-cross, and I can't deny it."

"Something will have to be done."

"So it will. Don't you suppose I'm not giving my mind to it. A fore-handed man me, with all my faults. I've gived parson a last chance to mend the job and do his duty. If he fails me, 'tis the church that fails me. I shall be very sorry to leave it; but with a wife and darter depending on my usefulness——"

"How you do deceive yourself!" cried Emanuel Codd from his corner. "All the same," he added, "I'm not blaming you. I've got a crow to pick with the Establishment myself, as all know. Every man's a right to justice, and since he don't get it in this world once in a generation, he must look to the next for it, and to Providence in general. But I, with my lifelong religion, ban't in any better case than you, as took it up at a whim and seem like to drop it again."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Peter.

"We've always reckoned you to be one of the lucky ones, Codd. Good work and good wages for over half a century, and good health and no relations—what more can a poor man expect from Providence? You've got a lot more than your share, if you ask me."

"As to good work—yes," said Mr. Codd. "Plenty of work; and the more I do the more I may do. A willing horse I've been all my life, and driven accordingly. But when you speak of good wages——"

He looked straight at his master and Ives was quite ready for the challenge. There had been half a dozen minor disturbances since the death of Mrs. Pomeroy, but her son, mindful of her methods, had exercised an unusual patience. To-night he felt not patient, and since others heard the indictment, he turned to Codd.

"Well, go on. What about wages?"

"Every man in this here bar knows what I get, I

believe. You've always had money and none of it, Ives Pomeroy, so you can't tell what it is to be grey-headed and yet only scrape a few shillings a week like what I do. You can't live with money like you can with mates, equal and friendly. It bosses you, or else you boss it. And it's bossed you more and more since your mother died. I will say that afore the nation. You're greedy of it, or you'd double my wages."

Moleskin spoke.

"You're a liar, Codd," he said. "This young man, whatever else he may be, don't care for money more than any other dirt. And I speak from my knowledge of him. The half-crowns——"

"Shut up, Cawker," interrupted Ives. "Don't come between me and this fool. He's been courting trouble ever since my mother went, and now, by God, he shall have it. Look here"—and he turned to Codd—"when you gave notice a month agone and I treated you same as my mother would have done and took no heed, what did you do?"

"I stopped on out of respect to her memory, that's what I did."

"You went poking round to every farm this side of Tavistock to see who'd take you on. And you found not half a dozen that wanted you, and not one—*not one*—who'd give you the wages I do."

Mr. Codd looked as angry as an old man can.

"You hound!" he said, "you've been spying upon me and hearing lies, or inventing 'em. Work, indeed! 'Tis a damn disgrace to you as I should be expected to work at my age. Any other master would pension me off with full wages, as your mother meant to do, and told me so with her own lips. But—but—working hard to escape hard work—and true in a sense. But——"

"Be that as it will, I give notice," answered Emanuel.

"Here, afore these men, for the last time I give notice and won't call it back. I go this day month."

"No, you won't call it back," answered the other, who was quite as wrathful as Codd. "You'll go to-morrow, and if you and your box ban't outside my gate afore noon, I'll set the dogs on you. You crooked-minded, evil old snake! How I've suffered you all these years the Lord knows. But no more. You've done for yourself now. *Take* notice—that's what you've got to do. I'm tired of hearing you give it."

"Find a better man, that's all," said the veteran.

"And that's what I shall do. There's better'n you on every hedge."

Peter here intervened.

"You're taking up too much of the conversation, if I may say so," he remarked. "'Tis my way to let everybody have his part, and I'm sure, Ives, you know your manners too well to wash dirty linen in public like this."

"As good as a pantomime," said a thin labourer in the corner. "And I'll take his job, if you please. I didn't catch what money he gets exactly; but no doubt 'tis a good few shillings better'n mine."

"You shut your mouth, mate," answered Moleskin. "You're a foreigner in these parts, and Mr. Pomeroy wants a man with known character and qualifications. I'm the lad for his money! He won't have to look no further than me for a new man."

Ives laughed.

"To think of you in harness! No, no, my old night-hawk, I don't want you working for me no more. What you call work, I call play. You spend all your time working hard to escape hard work—that's what you do."

The reformed poacher smiled.

"A very good joke—and true in a sense. But 'tis wrong that I should have to be troubled about money. I'm not the nature to be pinched. I don't thrive on it. I ax

to be treated in a large, generous spirit to bring out my flavour. If there's to be trouble about rent and food, I shall be spoilt and my nature will suffer."

Mr. Codd had departed and Pomeroy, under the genial influence of the inn, soon recovered his temper. He rather enjoyed the respect paid to him as a man of some means. He found himself with three hundred a year from money saved by his immediate ancestors, and he believed that Vixen Tor Farm might be made to yield more than was at present the case. Finally to have done with Codd was a relief to his mind, and those present were very ready to approve his definite action.

"A clever but a cranky man," declared Peter. "Looks at human nature in a very unkind, sour spirit, and always did. Nothing anybody does can have a good motive to it in his opinion. Why, he can't give a little child a smile—a sure sign of a bad heart that."

"And as for the female sex," declared Moleskin, "well, there's no doubt some dashing she must have used him shameful in his youth."

"And no doubt he deserved it," said the thin labourer.

"Certainly he did," continued Moleskin. "I've seen such men, though none with so much sloe in 'em as him. The world's a feast to the likes of him, because other people's misery and trouble be his food. A joke to him are his fellow-creatures; but he's no joke to them; and for my part, if I was set in justice, I'd knock such fellows on the head once for all and use 'em to manure turnips. Codd would be better in that shape than on two legs, running about to worry people."

None questioned these sentiments, and then Moleskin changed the subject. As for Ives, he soon returned to his horse and overtook Mr. Codd on the way home. He was passing without further speech when Emanuel spoke.

"Since I'm going after light to-morrow, I'll thank you to name my annuity. And I tell you man to man to be

honest. Your mother and your father have gone, and I be left at your mercy, owing to your mother's weakness."

"Don't you say that."

"I do say it. She didn't know you, though she thought she did. What be you going to allow me for my natural life, that's what I ax you?"

"I'd give you the price of a rope if you'd promise to hang yourself."

"That would be to meet you t'other side the grave, and I've no wish to do it. I despise you and I defy you. I've done with you. I call on you for my lawful rights, and that's all."

"You can have more than that. You've no lawful rights, and if I let you go in the workhouse none could blame me. I'll give you half a crown a week while you live—for my mother's sake."

"You wicked rogue!" burst out the old man, "you damned robber. Enough to make your mother's bones——"

The younger roared him down.

"Leave my mother alone! You to mangle her name on your poisonous tongue. My mother never knew the man you were, or she'd have turned you adrift twenty year ago. And don't you come in my sight again, or, old as you are, I'll skin you with my horsewhip. You've tormented my life ever since I could walk, and I'm thankful to be rid of you; and half a crown a week is half a crown a week more than you're worth, and money ill spent."

"The kingdom shall ring with this! And you, pretending as you cared for your poor mother and laughing at her wishes the moment she'm in the ground."

For answer Ives struck at the other with all his might, but it was dark and Codd stood out of range. The whip hissed through the air and Emanuel hastened from the footpath and crouched behind a furze-bush.

"Don't you see my face again," cried Ives; then he went on his way, and not until he had returned home, put

up his horse and entered the house, did the old man creep back and get up silently to his attic.

Pomeroy found his grandmother waiting and a bowl of soup on the hob. Jane was asleep and her grandson wakened her. He did not perceive her weariness, and began a long and furious tirade against the world in general and the monstrous things that happened in it.

He mentioned a case of cruel injustice at Tavistock; he swore at Arthur Brown, who had lately thought it desirable to send him some pamphlets upon the subject of chemical manures; he blamed Matthew Northmore because the farmer had refused to oblige him in the matter of a sale; he cried out that the world was a hotbed of gross injustice.

"Look where you will, you see the poor bullied by the rich, the weak ill-treated by the strong. It's a damned world, grandmother, and nobody be doing anything to make it better."

The ancient woman yawned and looked to the door.

"'Tis all in Higher Hands than ours," she said.

"Why don't the Higher Hands do something then? If God's a just God, why do these things happen?"

"Us'll know some day, Ives."

"Perhaps we shall; but that don't better it. Is it right for wrong things to happen? That's the big question. If we ban't allowed to do wrong, why can God Almighty?"

And up aloft Mr. Codd, out of the bitterness of a wounded and outraged heart, also arraigned his God on the subject of the annuity and this sequel to fifty years' hard work. He put his Sunday clothes into a wooden box that was covered with a spare piece of old wall-paper. The box was not large, but he owned hardly enough to fill it. There remained ample room for the old beaver hat that he wore on Sundays.

"If I ban't upsides again with that anointed scamp afore he'm a year older, may the Dowl forgive me!" he said to himself while he packed. "If I can't do it no other way, I'll burn his ricks come autumn. And damn his mother, too! She ought to have had better sense; 'twas her womanly meanness done it. No saint, after all—just like all the rest of human creatures. She knowed well enough he'd do something like this."

At earliest dawn Mr. Codd took his box on his back and left Vixen Tor without ceremony. He went to *The Jolly Huntsmen* and had breakfast there; then he looked about to hire a room and to seek employment. The room he quickly secured in the house of a quarryman; but to find work was not so easy.

CHAPTER XXXI

NORTHMORE AND POMEROY

THE evolution of morals is a fact patent to any student of human nature and human history, for the operations of this stupendous law persist alike in the worlds of matter and of mind. Parental sympathy has been shown the matrix and starting point of all love; and as the coral insect, building under the darkness of great waters with steadfast instinct, reaches into the light at last, to make a home for fair creatures with wings and fronds, so sympathy for offspring, working blindly in the fish and fowl, in the great ape and vanished being whose eyes first glowed with conscious intelligence, has fought upwards and brought man to the moral altitude where now he stands. His zenith is not yet, but the rational spirit looks forward, and hope grows justified when the dark history of the past is contrasted with the brighter story of yesterday and the noble prophecy of to-morrow.

Ives Pomeroy had been endowed with such a wealth of parental sympathy as falls to the lot of few men, and the effect of this treasure became manifest in his relations with other people. He grew somewhat more considerate; he showed more reserve in his attitude to women generally. His mother's memory raised his respect for her sex; but he was fond of women and did not live without them.

The man's chief interest began to be permanent marriage, and in this connexion he thought often of Ruth Rendle. His increasing sense served as a mirror wherein outlines, formerly indistinct, at last displayed their true contours. When she left the Vixen he missed her presence; but such a minor deprivation was merely felt as a

shadow swallowed by the greater eclipse of his mother's death. Her individuality, though slight beside Avisa's, was strong for so young a woman, and to Pomeroy, himself young, Ruth did not seem a slight presence. To a child another child appears to have plenty of character. Now Ives thought upon her a great deal, and her virtues grew more considerable to him in the light of his own ripening understanding. He began to respect her more distinguished attributes. He also knew that she was a handsome girl with a beauty different from, yet superior to, the sort of beauty he affected. That he could perceive this is a fact remarkable enough to be chronicled.

Lastly, Ives never forgot what his mother thought of Ruth and what his mother once had hoped with respect to her and him. The man's interest matured slowly; then an event served to quicken it. As he became more occupied with the affairs of Ruth Rendle's life, he grew to understand that much was hidden from him, and he set to work to find the truth of the matters concealed. She was not a happy woman, and he did not know the reason. In course of time he came approximately to see it and guessed that Matthew Northmore was in some measure responsible for Ruth's darkness. He watched, and he noted not seldom in the bar of *The Jolly Huntsmen* that Matthew's advent checked the girl's spirits and reduced her to uneasiness. She was deferential and apologetic to Northmore, as though she owed him something. She suggested one who went under an obligation. But Ives soon convinced himself that Ruth suffered persecution, and that Northmore continued to be a nuisance.

Doubt turned to certainty when Ruth finally left Merivale and took a situation in a pastrycook's shop at Tavistock. He tried hard to make her confess that she had fled from Northmore, but she would not. She parried his attack until she annoyed him.

"There were more reasons than one for my going,"

she said steadfastly; "but they are personal. I'm better here, Ives. Mrs. Foster is kindness itself; the work's interesting to me, and I shall do well, though 'tis a slow, heavy air after the Moor."

"That man drove you away," he repeated, "and I've got a crow to pick with him for doing it."

He left her, and a day later, while still much concerned at Ruth's departure, Ives met Northmore beside the river. It was an encounter unfortunate in every respect, for here clashed two men who were moved by mutual secret resentment, and who both believed that the other was responsible for a personal disaster. To Northmore Ruth's departure meant tragedy; and he blamed Pomeroy for it; while from the standpoint of Ives, Matthew and only Matthew had caused the girl to depart. It was a bad day in the heart and temper of both, and the weather chimed with their spirits and inspired to harshness. For a fierce wind from the east had blown winter back into spring for a season and banished all the joy of May. The Moor scowled with a leaden face; the sky was only lighter of hue, yet leaden also; the river ran sulky grey amongst the hills and seemed to chatter curses where the freezing wind ruffled its pools and backwaters. But the plovers mewed in the marsh and whirled above their nests; the wind-blown lark sang aloft; the golden gorse brakes held up their flame against the darkness and seemed to warm the wind a little.

Northmore on foot was passing Ives with an inarticulate grunt of recognition. They had never spoken since Mrs. Pomeroy's death until the present, but now Ives, in the vein to quarrel and much impressed with the justice of his cause, struck out into speech much as another man might have struck out into blows. He hungered to have a quarrel. His blood cried for it; and swiftly he got more than he bargained for.

"D'you know what you've done?" he began violently.

"But I suppose you do, if you're not blind. I mean Ruth—why the hell couldn't you let her alone? Always after her in season and out, though you must have seen, if you had eyes in your head, that you was troubling her cruel. Why, cheerful though she might be in the bar, and merry even, for her, the minute you came in with your fiddle face she'd shrink up and her mouth would go tight and her eyes would go sorrowful, and she'd look at you out of the corner of 'em, as girls can without moving their heads an inch. Frightened her—that's what you did; and now you've frightened her away altogether, and be damned to you!"

Northmore gasped before this sudden and terrific attack; then he answered:

"Same as ever, I see. Always poking your nose into other people's affairs and reading everything wrong and trying to make mischief and hurt people's feelings. A bad day for you when your mother died, Pomeroy. She stood between you and many a well-deserved thrashing."

"Don't talk fool's talk about thrashing grown men. D'you think I don't know 'twas a bad day for me when my mother died? If I don't know it, who should? You can leave that and mind your own business; and the man who'd like to thrash me is quite welcome to try—you with the rest. What I say to you is you've ruined the girl's life with offering yourself to her when she don't want you; and if you were a decent man, instead of a selfish coward, you'd have kept away from her and let her bide in peace. Now she's gone and——"

"And—what? For the likes of you to talk! You—you, who know less about her than anybody living. You, who never cared for any mortal thing but your own selfish self and your own evil passions and amusements. Why, damn you, how do you dare to stop me and lecture me? You tell me to mind my own business, like your cursed

cheek. And what about yours? Is the girl your business? Did you ever give a thought to her? Do you know what she is? She's an angel from heaven, too good to breathe the same air with such as you. And yet she did, and was under the same roof with you, and yet you couldn't see—— But of course you couldn't, a vicious, low blackguard like you. How should a mind like yours understand the wonder of a woman like that?"

Ives was staggered at this answer, but he soon found words.

"Of course nobody but Matthew Northmore knows the good points in a woman. Such a clever chap at 'em as him! And so successful with 'em. Poor girl—no, I don't know how good she is—no man knows how good a woman can be—but I know she's got enough sense to give you a wide berth, and I hope you'll take the hint and keep away from her. And you'd better! She've got no chap to look after her, and so I mean to—for my mother's sake."

Northmore, long convinced that Pomeroy had no scrap of affection for Ruth, was struck to absolute dumbness by this statement. The irony of it crushed him. Here was he ready to fight and shed every drop of his blood for the woman he worshipped, while this man, who cared not a jot for Ruth, out of regard for his mother, now proposed to play the part of her protector. This faulty, passionate fool actually stood here and lectured him—him, Matthew Northmore, whose heart was worth a thousand hearts like that of Ives, and whose imperishable love was to the futile and fickle flame of Pomeroy as the light of the moon to the death-gleam of shooting stars.

He stood silent, then burst into rage.

"You brazen rascal, to stand there before your betters and teach them! Get out of my sight, you and your mean knowledge of bad women! What have I to do with you, you worthless straw? And what have she to do

with you; poor woman, if she only knew it! I wish to God she understood the truth of you, as she knows the truth of me—then—— That girl's a million times more to me than ever she was or could be to your mother; and her good is more to me than my own, or any good on earth. Therefore you keep from her also! Herd with your kind; go on with your own worthless life and let her see the sort of man she puts before——"

He broke off, dimly sensible even in his extremity of rage, that he was saying too much. He stopped, choked down the torrents of words at his lips, and went his way, while Ives stood and stared after him. He, too, had been beside himself; but he apprehended something of the possible meaning in these last syllables, and he cried out no last word. He stood still, his physical and mental heat both cooled, until the east wind broke into his thoughts and struck a shiver through him. Then he proceeded about his business.

The men were destined to meet again before the day was done. They elbowed by chance at the inn after nightfall, and the smouldering fires burst forth again at another point. They wrangled concerning a third party at present under arrest for some suspicious dealings with a pony, and Northmore spoke to Peter Toop.

"I've had my suspicions of that man a good long time. In fact, I told one or two to keep their eye on him."

"Your way," suddenly retorted Ives, who smarted for a further thrust—"your way to suspect evil and then tell it where 'twill hurt a man most."

"You mustn't be rude, Pomeroy," said Mr. Toop. "You know my rule in this bar."

"Why don't you check that man then? What's he saying but hard things against *one* who may be innocent? He's as bad and worse than that old blackguard I've just got rid of. 'Twas him, Northmore there, who got me put away backalong. I haven't forgot!"

"You pitiful liar!" cried the other. "All men know that's as far from truth as can be. Yet, to make a case against me, you bring it up now. Clink! And where do the likes of you deserve to be—raving and ranting and misbehaving and bringing a whole district down into the dirt."

"If I get clink again, 'twill be for you then," shouted Ives in a rage. "You're a low-minded, evil-thinking wretch, to goad a man this way. But I understand very well how 'tis; because a decent girl won't stand your slimy love-making——"

"Drop that, or I'll break your head in!" cried the other. He seized an empty pewter and lifted his arm to fling. Ives dashed forward and in a moment the men were rolling on the sawdust of the floor.

No immediate harm came of this meeting, however, for others were in the bar and Ives was pulled off Northmore, as one angry dog is pulled off another, by the scruff of the neck. He rose, cleaned himself, and uttered deliberate threats.

"You'll rue this day, farmer, as long as you live; and let these who hear me, hear me. I've got to be even with you, and I will be. You wait and see, you that torment women and set the police on men! I'll punish you for to-day's work and the work of the past, too. I'd have forgot it years and years ago, and I did let it go for my mother's sake. But now you shall be paid in full and God's my Judge!"

He went out, and a few minutes later Codd came in and heard sympathy being extended to Northmore. The incident was related to him, and since the wrong-doings of Ives happened to be Emanuel's favourite topic, he related much that he knew, invented much else, and coloured all with his own ill-will.

"As for me, I be cast out with a pittance," he concluded; "and well the villain knows that I must starve

or go in the Union, if no man will come forward and give me work."

"You can come to me, if you like," said Matthew. "I'm making changes."

"My word! That'll sting him! So I will, then, and thankful to come, and what I don't know about things—pigs included—ban't worth knowing," declared Mr. Codd.

"He's sworn openly to do me a harm," answered Northmore, "so we can treat him like a mad dog henceforth. I'd like to shoot the scoundrel at sight, for my part; and it may come to it."

The conversation changed, while Northmore drank deep for him, and delayed to leave the bar and go home.

Meanwhile Ives cooled as he returned to Vixen Tor. To-day he had reached a high water-mark of folly and impatience. And alone in the night, he perceived what he had done and mourned for it. By an effort he strove to look at this matter with other eyes than his own. He judged what it must be for the master of Stone Park to love and not be loved. He felt that Northmore's stubborn persistence was to his credit. Ives would have done the same under like conditions. Moreover, in his heat the other had shown a little of the truth. It appeared that Northmore knew a secret. Was it possible that Ruth Rendle——? He felt the possibility, and it did not surprise him as much as it might have surprised some men. He attracted women, and since adolescence he always had done so. They fascinated him and they knew it; and the reward was their goodwill and interest. That Ruth should like him did not, therefore, astonish him; but it pleased him greatly. Reflecting upon marriage with her, he grew cool and amiable and happy. He regretted that he had made a fool of himself, but attached no particular importance to the incident, for he had done the like so often.

Presently he thought upon his mother and became mild and gracious and sane before he slept. He determined

to see Northmore and apologize. The whole incident, in the light of a restored tranquillity, became mean and insignificant. He doubted not that the other man would view it similarly after sleeping on it. But he forgot the point of view. It is easy to be magnanimous on the road to victory.

CHAPTER XXXII

MOLESKIN ON HIMSELF

After his mother's death Ives had eagerly sought for any recorded glimpses of her thoughts and opinions in the shape of letters. To every one of his relations and to many of his mother's friends, he had written on this theme; and he had been rewarded in several cases by receiving old communications on various subjects. Some sent copies, but would not part with the originals. The receipt of any such thing made a feast day for Pomeroy, and still they came occasionally. All interested him deeply and one saved him from a foolish error.

Ives had nearly promised Moleskin to put fifty pounds into a little enterprise for quarrying granite. Greater affairs of like nature prospered in various parts of the Moor, and Mr. Cawker, fired by the agreeable prospect of making some money without working for it, endeavoured to collect a few sanguine spirits and start a company. He knew a good deal about the subject and succeeded in convincing one prosperous farmer and a small tradesman or two. It remained with Ives to take a share, and he intended to do so until chance words in his mother's writing changed his mind. It was a letter written many years before to one of her brothers long dead; and it strove to dissuade him from trusting his savings to a copper mine. Ives knew the sequel. His uncle had speculated and lost all his money.

The letter possessed another interest for Pomeroy: it told him a little that was new to him concerning his father. Other missives had done the like, and with years and reflection, Ives was able to build up a fairly accurate picture of the previous Ives Pomeroy—a picture that differed

from his grandmother's portrait. It was not a character that much appealed to Ives, and the more he knew of his father, the more he found time to wonder why Avisa married him. He dared not express any such opinion to his grandmother, but he openly rebelled when the old woman explained that Avisa in reality had won most of her sense and shrewdness from the father of Ives; for by intuition he guessed that the high qualities of his mother were intrinsic, and not such as a woman acquires from any mate.

Having decided against the quarry scheme, Ives went to Moleskin's home, knocked at the red door, and entered.

An incident happened to ruffle him at Merivale bridge, for there by chance he met Matthew Northmore. They had not been in one another's company since the fight at the inn, and now Ives stepped forward and held out his hand.

"I want to say——" he began; but Northmore, who was alone, put his hands in his pockets, turned away and looked over the parapet of the bridge. Ives felt his blood in a flame, but he could do nothing, and went on up the grassy short cut from the valley to the hill. Looking back a moment later, he saw certain local men arrive, and guessed that Northmore had been waiting at the bridge for them. Matthew clearly meant war henceforth; but Ives was no longer warlike. For the moment life ran kindly with him; therefore he forgot all his vain threats and desired friendship rather than offence. It was his way to banish particulars of a difference and then, when other men with better memories cut him, show surprise and feel a sense of injury.

Mrs. Cawker happened to be alone when he arrived, but she told him that both Mary and her father would soon return.

"I hear," he said, "that my man, Rupert Johnson, is going to be married to your young woman. Wish 'em joy, I'm sure."

"Yes," she answered drearily. "A nice young chap. You'd wonder what he could have seen in her, wouldn't you?"

"Not at all. My mother always thought a lot of Mary."

"I hope he won't go back on it and repent his bargain."

"He's not that sort. She'll make a sensible wife."

"She wanted to stop with me till I was carried off, but I wouldn't have that. Wouldn't be fair to the poor man. A bit tough she is, and older than him by five years. God send his gorge won't rise at her. But what with starvation at the door, she's better away."

Ives cast about to comfort this woman, but failed.

"After all," he said, "you've got your husband."

The sufferer poured the concentrated essence of forty years' bitterness into her reply.

"Ess fay! That's true," she answered. "I've got Mr. Cawker!"

Pomeroy felt uneasy, and the more so that he was here with bad news. But when Moleskin and Mary arrived, the old man took his friend's decision with perfect good humour.

"You may be right," he said; "'tis always a doubtful speculation digging into Dartymoor. 'You scratch my face and I'll pick your pocket,' that's what the Moor says; and many an adventurer have found it so. Well, that ends it, for t'others won't go in without you. I must think of something else."

"I've just been saying how glad I am about Mary. Johnson is a very good fellow."

"I hope you'll see your way to raise his wages come presently," suggested Moleskin. "But I know you will—you're built in that large-minded plan, thank God. Poor maiden, she'm a bit down-daunted to-day."

Mary was indeed somewhat tearful.

"'Tis like this," she explained. "Us can never have even a week of all good without trouble to spoil it; and now, just because Rupert have axed me to name the day, what should happen but his reverence meets me and says a good few hard things about father!"

"I'm disappointed in the man," confessed Mr. Cawker. "He've not done his share of late—in fact, things be coming to a climax between us. 'You must give and take, Vicar,' I said to him when last we met, and he allowed himself to answer that I was the sort who did all the taking and none of the giving. And me at the man's door with three pounds of trout, all for love and friendship, at the time!"

"He said to me that Heaven helps those who help themselves," explained Mary. "In fact, he doubted if father ever had been converted in the true sense of the word. A very great sorrow to me to hear him speak such harsh things, I assure you, Mr. Pomeroy."

"As to helping myself, 'twas that very thing he made such a fuss over a while backalong," laughed Moleskin; "but it's growing quite clear to me that the man's right according to his limited mind. I've got dissatisfied with our parson's opinions lately, and the more I hear him, the narrower he grows. He don't suit me; he don't agree with my views. In fact, not to put too fine a point upon it, I think he's mistaken. One man's meat is another man's poison. It all comes back to that."

Mrs. Cawker spoke.

"A pity ever you took up with him, as I said at the time. You'll never make honest money. The power isn't in you."

"You'm always right, my old martyr," he answered; "but I'm not going to have a good wife go hungry for twenty parsons. Now I'll ask this young chap to lend me five shillings till next Saturday, and then I'll meet him at *The Jolly Huntsmen* and return it."

Silence fell upon the company as Ives produced a couple of half-crowns.

"And as for you, Mary," continued Moleskin, "you're my only child, and as good a girl as ever waited overlong to find a sensible man. And you shall be married some time in the fall—after the pheasants come in—and if there ban't a spread in this house that'll astonish the spiders, don't call me a sportsman no more!"

"You'll break my heart yet, father."

"But I'll fill your stomach, my dear. The human soul can support anything, given a good table. It's bad food brings half the wickedness into the world."

Mrs. Cawker continued to be silent, and Ives took his leave.

A week later he met Moleskin by appointment at the inn, and Mr. Cawker elaborated his philosophy for the benefit of a full bar.

Moleskin was in a genial, expansive, and egotistical mood. He preached his gospel and drank meantime, now with this admirer, now with that.

"A man's a fool to do any work he doesn't enjoy doing," he began; "but only enjoy it and then 'tisn't work at all, but play. In my opinion we was all put here to play, not to work. We'm all the Lord's children, and don't a parent like to see his little ones having a romp?"

"'Tis your grandfather's lazy gipsy blood in you, Cawker," said Mr. Toop.

"It may be, Joel. I won't say it isn't; but it's solid wisdom. Look at the high old life he led! Then they took the fine fellow, and shut him up, and broke his gallant heart. The Lord meant us to enjoy ourselves; 'twas His Almighty plan. We're the only creatures that like drinking when we're not thirsty; we're the only creatures that can make a joke or see a joke; and we're the only creatures that understand the art of kissing our females. Think of all that! Be us to waste those great gifts? Let

the beasts that perish work! We've got something better to do, I believe. Our first business is to be happy."

"Many of us can be happy and contented and still work, Mr. Cawker," argued Samuel Bolt, who was of the company; "why, there's men enjoy mending roads and tacking hedges and ploughing fields."

"Let 'em then, Sammy. If that work makes 'em happy, then it's play and not work. I say nothing against that. Only my taste is different. But unfortunately the things I like best, such as drinking and smoking, and talking to all you clever chaps, and looking at the clouds running over the sky and so on—well, there's no money to 'em."

"A man ought to be useful before everything," declared Rupert Johnson. He handed his future father-in-law another glass of liquor as he spoke.

"Well, be useful, Rupert, if you feel called to it. Do what your nature craves for. The Lord who made you knows best. My experience is that the pleasantest companions ban't the useful men. They're apt to be puffed up with the work they do and give themselves the credit instead of their Maker. There's no credit in doing what you love to do. In my case, of course, I've got to work, but henceforth I'll do the work I like and combine business with pleasure so long as I can crawl about. Of course to do work that only makes money, spoils all, and is a dirty waste of life. 'Tis only a makeshift and not real life. Well, nobody will come forward to me and say, 'Enjoy yourself your own way, Moleskin, and live out your days at my expense'; so I've got to make my pleasure my business and kill to live, like the varmits without souls. And that shows the order of things be wrong."

"You'll go back to poaching, in plain words," said Joel.

"I won't work. I've got no use for work, and not another stroke will I do. 'Tis only playing the hypocrite, and, to be plain, I should feel ashamed to meet the Lord come presently if I wasted any more of my time working."

"You'll meet somebody else more like," said the master of Stone Park, who had just entered.

"Not me, Matthew Northmore. I'm all right; but I shan't go to glory through the church door. That sort of thing makes all against my properer nature. I be going to be myself from this day forward."

"You'll be locked up then," declared Samuel Bolt. "The likes of you, Mr. Cawker, did ought to get away from themselves," he added.

"Can't be done, Sammy," answered Moleskin. "A tame canary's quite right to twitter; it's made so. But 'tis no good a tame canary telling a hawk 'tis naughty to kill the little birds. You go on driving the steam-roller and playing hymns on your penny whistle, my son. That's your jòy and duty, and you do both very nice. Only don't ax everybody to do the same."

"It's all very well," said Peter Toop, "but if every man was to do what is right in his own eyes, what becomes of the State and the Church, and God Almighty too for that matter? We're born sinners and——"

"Not at all, Peter. That stuff is played out, I assure you. We're born as innocent and blameless as every kitten and puppy that comes squeaking into this hard world."

"Then what about Christ, the only Forgiver of sins? Got you there!" said Samuel.

"Time for Him to forgive sins when I've done 'em," answered Moleskin. "I'm not a miserable sinner, and I'm tired of yelping out that I am on every seventh day. 'Tis only to cry stinking fish afore the Throne of Grace, and I'll never do it no more. A bad compliment to my Maker, and terrible poor-spirited, to say the least of it."

Mr. Cawker drank and smoked and listened to various arguments aginst his philosophy.

"When I'm sober," he said, "I like to talk about sport and women, and when I'm drunk I turn to religion. And

that brings me round to women again, because God's always on their side, as every married man knows, if bachelors don't."

"You've had a good one—in fact, a better one than you deserved," said Rupert Johnson. "I'm sure your poor lady be a wonder of sense and patience."

"When you speak of Mrs. Cawker in a mixed company, you go too far, Rupert," answered Moleskin. "Mrs. Cawker hasn't been a woman for the last five-and-twenty years. There's many a poor dear in the world you can't call a woman, but merely a fellow-creature, as have drawn a blank where us men be interested and clean missed love. You know the sort: they're useful in their humble sphere, I won't deny it, but 'woman' be too noble a name for 'em. They belong to the neuter state, like bees. My wife was all I could wish till her barrow-load of infirmities overtook her; then she sank to be a mere cottage hospital, and 'tis nought but her brave soul and my care that keeps the spark in her ill-treated frame."

"There's justice in heaven, Moleskin," said Peter stoutly. "Justice is the corner-stone there, and so be sure your wife will have all the joys it has not entered mind of man to conceive."

"She ought to—and a bit over," answered Mr. Cawker. "Her life has been one sleepless ache for nearly a quarter of a century, and she've borne it so brave as a regiment of soldiers."

Moleskin was now becoming intoxicated, but nobody knew it yet excepting himself.

"And I'll say this also," he began again. "As a poor human man married to a saintly, bedridden ruin, I've suffered, too. I may have looked round for consolation in a quiet way and not spurned the kindly hearts that rose up here and there by God's good grace. Because 'tis well known He don't forget a sparrow, much less an immortal soul with manly instincts. But be that as it

may, nothing can atone for a wife like mine, and I'm only more sorry for her than I am for myself. And we shall both get our reward, and a rich one."

"You overlook the recording angel, as easy as you overlook your score in this bar," said Mr. Joel Toop.

"Not a bit of it," answered the poacher. "He is an angel—that's the main thing about the chap with the Books—and he's got the large experience of an angel. Lord love you, Joel, after all that recorder have had to set down against the account of the world, my little lot won't look bigger than a grain of sand on the shore! A few birds with uncertain owners, and a few salmon as belonged to nobody in particular, and a few jokes against my betters, including my Maker. What is it! Mere schoolboy naughtiness put against the big sinners. And won't that angel know it? Bless your life, he'll think no more of my page than you do of the money in your till on a quiet day. Take big ideas if you want to see yourself as Heaven sees you."

"To hear a human worm on such good terms with his hereafter is a caution," cried Joel Toop; "and I hope none of you young men in this bar will give another thought to him."

"I hope you all will," said Moleskin. "If you don't grasp the difference between big and little now, you never will. And then you'll go through the world with wrong opinions and be a terror to your neighbours forever. Suppose I was to come out on the wrong side and be booked for the bad place, what can they do then to the Stonehouse murderer that swung last week at Exeter for poisoning three women? Poison 'em! Bless 'em! I'd rather cut my throat ten times over than poison anything in a petticoat! What becomes of him, then, or of that beauty, Saul Ash, that stole his wife's mother's money, then knocked her on the head and burned down her cottage?"

"Hell's hotter in one place than another belike," haz-

arded Samuel; and Joel Toop applauded the ingenious theory.

Moleskin's eyes were closing, but he pulled himself together, emptied his last glass and made an end.

"Fire be fire, and hell fire lasts for eternity; and I haven't earned it; and I shan't get it; and more won't anybody in this bar. And now I be drunk, so one of you pious blades had better put your charity to use and see me home."

CHAPTER XXXIII

SAMUEL FALLS

RETURNING from his work at Stone Park, Mr. Codd chanced to meet Jill Bolt also on her way to Merivale. She rather desired to speak with Emanuel and now bade him a gracious "good-evening," because she knew that he cherished a bitter grievance against Pomeroy, and she, too, had not forgiven Ives. Her own dreary lot served daily to remind her of the past, and she kept her aversion warm. He continued to interest her more than any living man, and she felt that he had not ceased to be the spice of her life, though they no longer knew each other.

"Must seem funny to you being anywhere else than at Vixen Tor," she said; and Mr. Codd admitted it.

"'Tis a mournful, barren place after t'other; and Northmore ban't an easy man; but he's straight and don't change. Very different from that rogue in t'other place."

"Pomeroy, you mean? Yes, he is a rogue."

"He'll swing yet, and I should like to turn him off."

"Words don't break no shins. Why, you'm little better than my man. He talks a lot, but he'd not harm a mouse. If a man had treated me like that man has treated you, I'd never rest till I'd paid the score."

Emanuel Codd looked at her. She made no attempt to hide her passion.

"Ah," he said, "that's from the heart! I dare say you've got a crow to pluck with him, too. I've always thought——"

"You've thought wrong, then. 'Tis not that. He's tried to have his way with me, but I was too strong for him. Not my sort at all. All the same he did try, and

because he tried I hate the man. I'll pay him out some day, and I don't care who hears me say so."

He looked at her with admiration.

"It shows a very proper, self-respecting spirit in you," he said, "and I feel the same. Don't think I've done with the thief. To rob me of my pension—grasping scoundrel. I'll pay him yet, sure as my name's Codd. The people all hate him. No honest man can do with him. My master won't hear his name, and quite right, too. He threatened Northmore in the face of the company. Such an awdashus rip didn't ought to be at large. But I'll make him smart to his marrow yet."

Jill considered. The thought of an intrigue at the expense of Pomeroy attracted her; and here was a very ready weapon to her hand.

"It wants a brave man to stop him," she said.

He looked at her craftily.

"And maybe a cunning woman, too—eh?"

"Two heads are better than one, of course. A woman can plan and a man can do."

"I'd ruin him to-morrow if 'twas in my power, and I'm only waiting to see how best to do it," declared Codd.

"Let me help you. Let him as ruined others be ruined himself. Anyway I'll help you if you like. I——"

The offer was not acknowledged and not renewed, for many things swept between Jill's proposal and Emanuel's answer. They had reached Merivale and marked a crowd at Samuel's door. The doctor's trap was standing there, and two of Mr. Bolt's fellow-workmen stood and talked to the people. Seeing her, the men pushed forward a woman. It was Mary Cawker who now, with a white face and trembling tongue, broke the news to Jill.

"Your husband, Mrs. Bolt. I'm cruel sorry to say it, but you must stand the shock. Something on the steam engine busted all of a sudden, and it took charge going down Tavistock hill, and he couldn't stop it, and it turned

over, and he's—he's alive, but scalded cruel and broke his poor leg in the bargain. His mother's along with him and the doctor likewise."

Jill passed quickly and hastened to her husband.

Samuel was unconscious, and the doctor said that if his patient survived the shock he might recover. The burns were to be feared more than the broken leg. Yet, though Samuel escaped sudden death by a miracle, a kinder fate had slain him instantly, for it was not destined that he should survive. He returned to consciousness in the evening and began to give his mother a detailed account of the catastrophe. His great anxiety was to explain that through no personal fault the thing had happened.

For a week he lived, and then his burns killed him.

Owing to the religious opinions of his doctor, he suffered for six days longer than was necessary. To let any injured beast but man endure half as much, would have outraged England. We may ruin ourselves, body and soul, with the spirit of the poppy and none can interfere; but let euthanasia be offered to the dying, so that a fellow-creature shall suffer some few throbs less of mortal agony, and humanity protests in the name of law and order and religion.

The harmless fool, Samuel Bolt, endured as much physical torture as his frame could support before Nature extinguished him; and during those days, when the folk stopped their ears as they rushed past the cottage, men and women were kind and strove to do what they might for all the unhappy dwellers in that house. Old Mrs. Bolt's frenzy rendered her useless, and Jill could do nothing but watch the nurses. She never left her husband and never ceased to implore the doctor to hasten his end, after it was certain that Samuel could only linger horribly for a few days.

But medical science, with the skill of the Inquisition, fed him and fortified him. The doctor said afterwards

that the whole College of Surgeons could not have kept Samuel Bolt alive an hour longer. He was proud of his achievement.

Jill's husband returned to the dust at last and all Merivale attended the funeral. His mother also went, and among the bearers were Ives Pomeroy and the brothers Toop. A very general sympathy reigned for Rachel Bolt, but little overflowed for the widow. People doubted not that she would soon marry again, and it was generally understood how Samuel had not been happy in his home.

Jill had honestly and terribly felt her husband's sufferings; but not because he was her husband. His death was a matter of indifference, and it rose in time to a satisfaction. She was left poor, but she was still young. She found herself free, and her world appeared to be full of men.

Not until Samuel had sunk into the earth did she begin to build castles in the air; and then many possibilities awoke in her mind. Especially Ives Pomeroy occupied her thoughts, and her new attitude to the man appeared when next Emanuel Codd returned to the old subject.

A fortnight after her husband's death he met her and considered that it was not too soon to remind her of the last words that she had spoken to him. But he began by a general expression of regret at her misfortunes.

"A terrible time for you; still, the right chap will come along in due season. You'll forget all about all this after a year or two. The young can forget easier than us old people."

"I shall never forget. I've had my dose of marriage, anyway."

"I saw the man—Ives Pomeroy, I mean—with Ruth Rendle a bit backalong. He's after her now, I do believe. It might save one more unhappy woman if we—if we did what we want to do afore he has his way. His mother

always desired for him to marry her; but 'twill be doing her a kindness if we can prevent it."

There was a great deal in the mind of Jill that she could not utter to Emanuel. He waited for her malignity to inspire his malevolence. He was ready to execute what she cared to plan. But the time was still far from ripe.

"It's a thought awkward for me to do anything for the moment, because the man was exceeding kind about Samuel. He called every day, and they great bunches of grapes he sent did comfort Sam's raging thirst without a doubt."

"Grapes! The fool always runned to grapes when anybody was stricken. He bothered his mother's life out of her about grapes at the end. However, that's neither here nor there."

"I couldn't do anything against him for the minute; I don't feel like it."

"He won't know 'tis you. This is all silly rummage you'm talking. You've got the same cruel grievance against the rogue as you always have had. But for him you'd never have married Bolt and had your baby die, and your husband die, and all the rest of the misery that's fallen to your lot. Can't you see as he is responsible for everything? And then to hold back for a bunch of grapes—bought, no doubt, to let the neighbours hear about it."

"I never saw him when he came to ask for Samuel, and he never saw me either. He couldn't at such a time. All the same——"

Codd sneered.

"I see which way the cat be going to jump. You think he'll come after Samuel's leavings—eh? You think you'll catch him again. Not you! He's going to ax Ruth, and she'll say 'yes,' poor fool. Mark me, afore you can look round they'll be tokened. Once he's after a girl, the grass don't grow under his feet. You'll sit and wait

for him to come back till your fiery hair be white, but he'll not come."

She looked at Emanuel without speaking for a full minute. Then she answered slowly:

"Leave it a bit. You won't anger me, though you try to. I'll tell you more when I know more. It may pay you better to be friends with me than quarrel with me."

"You females!" he exclaimed. "Vanity's the backbone of you all. You think, even after all this, that you'll win him back again, with your red hair, and eyes on the ground! Don't you believe it! He's after t'other, or was a fortnight agone."

"I wasn't a free woman then. Now 'tis different."

It was Mr. Codd's turn to reflect a while.

"Of course the likes of him do nothing but what you don't expect," he said. "He might turn from Ruth to you again—just because 'tis the last thing on earth a sane man would do."

"He wants a woman, not a slip of a girl like that."

"He wants hell," answered Emanuel; "he's earned it and it shan't be my fault if he don't get it sooner or late."

"Bluster is only silliness," she answered. "Think a bit and don't make such a row. What would be most use to you, to have the man come round and mend your pension, or to have him—well, to do him an ill turn—burn his ricks or what not?"

"To burn his ricks be a very good thought," declared Codd. "And nobody would be better able to set onlight to 'em in the proper place than me."

"But if he was to double your pension—that would be better fun than putting a match to his goods."

"Perhaps it would be, but he'll not do that."

"Not single-handed; he might if there was anybody to put it in his head to do it."

"I was an old fool to come to you or any woman.

Don't I know 'em well enough, but I must be going to them to help me?"

"You might do worse. I'll see the man, or let him see me. We've been strangers lately along of one thing and another. But now 'tis different. I'll get at his inner thoughts if I can. I'm the sort that treat men as they treat me. If he wants me, he can have me. I'm in the market again."

"You'm a hard-hearted, selfish bitch, like all the rest," he said.

Then he went off in great annoyance and disappointment. Anon, however, he reconciled his mind to the situation; because he felt assured that Ives Pomeroy could not be tempted any more by the widow of Samuel Bolt. He would decline her advances and then, without doubt, Jill must return to the former standpoint of enmity and prove the more bitter for his indifference. Mr. Codd was getting good wages and doing easy work at Stone Park. At this time, therefore, he liked better the thought of striking his old master than receiving from him any increase of pension. He cherished his grand grievance and would have regretted its removal.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE AUGUST PAGEANT

On the last day of August there fell one of the rare moments of Dartmoor's highest glory. After eight and forty hours of mist and rain the wind drifted to the north and died there. Then the temperature rose and heat set the air dancing like a cloth of crystal thrown over the purple and gold of the wilderness.

On the slope of Cocks Tor, heather and autumnal furze, uttering their highest expression of splendour, glowed under the summer blaze and wove a gorgeous texture through the jade and sere harmonies of the hills. They spread upon the prevalent sepia of the Moor in comely tracts, though their pattern was broken by stark spaces fired during the previous spring. Yet even here, where Death had set his sign in the skeletons of the herbage and the darkness of charred earth, potentilla and galium helped to hide his work with galaxies of stars.

Ineffably brilliant the waste extended with heightened gleam and pulse to the crowns of Cocks Tor on the frontier land. Here stood a mountain not of porphyry; and from its trap-rock summit the great ridges of earth fainted and paled upon each other to the horizon. Under the throne of a westerning sun, the world was wrapped in gauzes of vapour grey and glittering. Thin, silky clouds crept along the lower chambers of the sky, and through their pearl the light fell in glowing columns and transparent shafts upon the valleys. In air was the mellowed tincture of the time; beneath it a first flush of autumn stroked barley and oats through far-away hazes, deepened the glory of ripe fruit in many orchards, awakened the weald with running fires of leaf and berry.

A dim world of elms and hedgerows, forests, fields, and tree capped knolls was faintly outlined far below through the burning and sun-soaked air. It spread in valleys and lesser undulations to Dartmoor's footstool; and its definitions glimmered softly through the grey of distant sunshine —a presence more diaphanous than any cloud's.

The sky crowned all with one arc of glory whose shade was light; the Moor embraced the foreground in fierce, almost unbearable splendour of heath and furze and glittering stone blazing together in the crucible of August; and above, flinging his ardour across three and ninety millions of miles, there reigned the unshadowed sun.

Aloft, upon the head of the tor in that glad hour, there happened the nuptial flight of ants. It was their brief-winged time of joy, and they whirled in a little black halo above the rocks and made a crown of life for the world. The sound of these myriads was audible and it came like the sustained throb of Pan's own passionate flute heard far away. The music persisted in a wail against the bass of the humble bees and the drone of insects that threaded the silence of this most lofty, most lonely pinnacle. Now the noise grew as loud as a bird's cry; now it waned to the whisper of rubbing grass blades; and the amazing tornado of ants warped here and there with the breath of the air, or as their countless wills simultaneously dictated. There seemed little method in the wild dance and delirium of the swarm; yet love ordered all and, in that midst of life, the sun forgot not the least scrap of life wrapped in the frenzy of the first end of life. Presently there would be mounds of dead to mark that aerial rite; unnumbered tiny gauzes would drop; unnumbered neuters, whose part is service, would minister to the matrons of the generation to come.

A woman listened to the wail of the ants and watched them; then she turned and looked at the outspread earth; and then she sighed and plucked a piece of ling. Out

of idleness rather than curiosity she examined it. She was resting for a few moments on her way home. She carried a heavy basket, and the unslaked fires overhead had wearied her. Jill lolled in a little cup of the heath and considered the sprig of the ling. Her mind was only partially set upon it, yet she marked the structure in careless cursory fashion, narrowed her eyes to focus the fine work, observed the brisk and wiry habit of the whole, the trim green formal foliage, and the surmounting inflorescence that sprang in spires of thirty and forty flowers. These bells were now alive, but presently their petals, four in four, would die and dry and make small chimes for the ringing of the winter wind.

Suddenly, far below in the direction she would presently take, Jill saw a man and woman. Interest of the most active sort awoke in her mind, but it was not a pleasant interest. She sat up in her lair and flung away the flowers.

"What be they doing up here?" she wondered.

They were evidently talking together and they appeared deeply interested each in the society of the other.

Presently they stopped some quarter-mile below Jill, and sat in the fern and continued their speech. She watched them, herself unseen, and felt that she would give much to know the subject of their conversation.

Ives Pomeroy and Ruth spoke together, and their topic was Matthew Northmore.

"No," she said, "he don't trouble me much now, poor fellow. You mustn't think that. He's a kind-hearted man really, Ives. I wish—I wish he was different."

"He hates me now, because I dared to tell him the truth. And look at his dirty little revenge. He engages Codd. I didn't think none the better of him for that. 'Twas done, of course, to annoy me."

"I don't think so."

"I know so. And I despise the mean creature. He's scored off me more than once during the past few years,

a brute, specially in the
you. But I'll cry quits
what I owe him. He's a man
a thing—and more won't I.
money rolls in on him."
for it."
it is, 'tis natural he should not.
you can't buy what you want to buy.
thing in the whole world he'd give all
and that's not for sale."
getting on," she said.
her with the air of possession. It had
him as a certainty that Ruth Rendle must
He had reached the point of desiring her
missing her when days passed and they did not
He had not, however, grown to be jealous of other
or fearful that she might not love him; but the
of that intenser emotion was near. He had heard
of Ruth lately behind her back, because Lizzie was
spending a month at Vixen Tor. Arthur Brown happened
to be away with a Cook's touring party in France, improving and enlarging his mind; and Lizzie felt very happy at the Vixen in companionship with her own. She wrote to her husband that Ives was marvellously improved, and she spoke ceaselessly to Ives of Ruth and of the mother's great ambition concerning her. The subject was agreeable to Ives, but Lizzie felt that his indifference to delay showed him not really lover-like. She chid him and foretold that he would lose Ruth altogether. "She may like you well enough, but she can't wait forever," Lizzie declared. "There's other men as good and well-to-do see her every day at Tavistock."

This true saying Ives remembered now as he looked at Ruth.

"Don't go just for a minute. Have you ever thought how changed I be, Ruth?"

"No. I don't see you much changed, Ives."

"Not since mother died?"

"No."

"I am, however; and specially to the girls. I did a lot of damned silly things in my young days—the cheek I'd got with 'em! But now I believe I'm getting a properer feeling towards 'em."

"That was foretold. 'Twas said that as you knew yourself better, you'd rate the females higher."

"I lay mother told you that."

"Yes, she did. That and much else."

"You never tell me the things she used to say about me."

"Why should I? Can't you guess them? 'Twasn't only of you we talked. She taught me all—all I know that's worth knowing."

He nodded, with his mother's nod, plucked a blade of grass and chewed it.

"Did she ever tell you of the girl in the dairy?"

"Yes."

"Did she laugh?"

"Yes."

"Did you?"

"No, Ives."

"You see, mother had put the cat in the dairy to catch a mouse; and then a little maid as we had then—she was sixteen and I was seventeen—she must needs sit in the dairy to see as puss didn't lap the cream. And I must needs go and keep the little maid company, lest her should be lonesome. And somehow, when mother popped in sudden, the cat was asleep and the girl was sitting on my lap with her arms round my neck."

"So your dear mother said."

"And we catched it pretty hot, I promise you. But you didn't laugh?"

"I didn't see nothing particular funny in it, Ives."

He deplored this.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I must get a wife."

She rose.

"And I must get about my business."

"When do you come back to *The Jolly Huntsmen?*"

"After ten o'clock. I'm to have two whole days' holiday and go back to Tavistock to work to come Monday."

"I'll come and meet you to-night," he said. "And what about Sunday? You haven't seen as much of Lizzie as she could wish yet. Will you drink tea along with us?"

"Yes, if she'd like."

"She would like. She's very anxious for you to see the baby again."

"A little beauty 'tis!"

"Can't say. Men ban't judges. But infant though he be, the creature's so like his father as two peas. The same great, pious, brown eyes—stupid as a calf's. He'd begin to lecture me, like Arthur does, if he could talk. He looks at me now as if he knew I was going to the bad place."

"I hope you'll teach him not to be a prig."

"I shan't get the chance. You'll come o' Sunday?"

"Yes, I will, and thank you."

"And I'll make up along the road to-night to see you home. Expect me down to the cross-roads at Moor Shop."

"Don't think of coming so far as that."

"'Twill be a pleasure to me to do it," he said.

She departed and Ives began to plan a great enterprise. He would meet her on the way back from Tavistock and ask her to marry him. He reflected and then hesitated. His old impetuosity was waning. He wondered what would happen to him if she refused. He considered that as yet he had not indicated by thought, action or speech that he felt tenderly towards her. They had been so much thrown together at his mother's end that he felt almost more like her brother than her lover. It was very probable that her

emotions amounted to no more. He set to work to wake the loverly mood. Yet something still lacked. He wondered what it was. He almost wished there was another in the field. Then he asked himself whether there might not be. And then he began to think about his mother. Fine weather and fair things growing in spring or dying beautifully in autumn reminded him always of her. And worthy deeds did the like; and kind words and all that was of good repute. He remembered her sentiments on many subjects, and sometimes he repeated them as occasion offered; and people who heard them in his mouth seldom failed to show astonishment.

He sat by the way for some time after Ruth had gone. A man on a pony gave him "good-afternoon," but he failed to hear and took no notice. Then, suddenly he looked up and saw standing in front of him a woman with a heavy basket. She wore black, and the years rolled away and the woman reminded Ives of how she had looked in the past, when he met her after her baby died.

Jill had seen Ruth Rendle depart and resolved on this strong move. Now the man started and stared at her. He actually blushed and she noted the fact, but her own skin showed no answering flush.

"I suddenly marked you on my way down. You was alone, so I ventured. Will you please let me thank you from my very heart, Mr. Pomeroy, for all your loving kindness to my poor Samuel?"

"You needn't thank me. 'Twas my grandmother."

"I know better; but I'll leave that. Since I'm here, let me humbly ax you to forgive me for all the past. I've been very wicked to you."

He breathed hard.

"What—what the devil d'you mean?" he asked.

"Have you forgot? You done right, and I—but 'twas losing you at the last minute, Ives. Mortal woman couldn't get over it all at once. 'Twas such a gashly thing. Pity

me a bit and then you'll larn to forgive me. You was always able to forgive a girl anything."

"Why for didn't you come to see my mother when she was dying?" he asked. "Lizzie told me long after that she'd sent to you and you wouldn't come."

"I know—I know—my wickedness, and my loss. But 'tis like this: from that night, Ives, I was turned to gall. I had a devil come into me. I couldn't forgive you, or her, from that awful night till long, long after."

"She had nought to do with it. 'Twas your own act. You weren't straight with me. You waited till you knew your husband's uncle was going to be married. Then you said you'd run away, because t'other game was up. That's why I threw you over."

"I only ask you to forgive me. I make no excuses, though I'll swear afore my Maker that never influenced me. I hesitated along of fearing for your good, not my own. I didn't think, even to the last minute, that I was good enough for you; and I wasn't; and 'twas respect for your mother as well as true love for you, that kept me off and off, till you was too much for me and made me promise. But I thank you for saving me as you did at the end."

"And spurned me after as if I was unclean."

"I'm only a woman. We can't be large-minded at such times. How would you have felt to me if I'd kept you waiting till daybreak at the Windystone and never come to you?"

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that your letter went to my husband, not to me. And I went that cursed morning and suffered as no woman ever suffered afore. 'Twasn't human to help feeling it after, even though I did hear 'twas no fault of yours."

He stared.

"Samuel had the letter?"

"Yes; and let me go, and kept the secret close as wax.

Only on his deathbed he told me and gave me the letter. I've got that letter now, Ives."

"Have you, by God!"

"He's gone to his rest now. Don't think hardly of him."

"Not me. And never said nothing! Poor worm! I'll trouble you for that letter, however."

"Of course you shall have it. 'Twas a very wise, noble letter. You've been the only light and sense that ever came into my life."

"What are you going to do?" he asked suddenly.

"Go back to my own people. Samuel left his cottage to his mother, till her death—then to me. The old woman says I can stop on if I've a mind to do it; but I've no mind to. She's itching to be back again and don't want a thing he've touched or used to be moved. She's always praying she may be allowed to see him appear like an angel."

"It pretty well knocked her out, I suppose?"

"She very near died, but doctor judges she may live a year or two yet. And 'tis right she should come back to her own house. But, of course, I couldn't bide with her, though we're very good friends indeed now he's gone."

"You'll go home?"

"Yes, till I find work."

"I'll carry your basket back for you, and you can give me that letter now this minute," he said.

"Thank you kindly, Ives. And will you say you've forgived me for the past?"

"'Tis the other way, I reckon. 'Tis you have to forgive me. 'Twasn't pleasant to treat a woman as I treated you, and if you smarted to be at the Windystone, you may guess I smarted not to be there. But the past be past, and the less either of us call it back again, the better."

At her cottage, however, Jill declared that she could not find the letter.

"You shall have it so soon as I can put my hand upon it," she said. "'Tis hidden away so safe that for the minute I can't exactly mind where 'tis. Come up to-morrow evening."

He promised to do so; and for that day this remarkable discovery so filled his imagination that Ruth, on her evening journey, saw nothing of him.

CHAPTER XXXV

DARKNESS ON GREAT MIS

ARTHUR BROWN arrived at Vixen Tor for a few days after his return to England. He was very instructive and never related any experience or incident without drawing some moral reflection therefrom. He showed himself deeply interested in his baby, and the father and son sometimes regarded each other in a manner that tempted Ives to grim amusement.

"Wonder what the thing will make of you," he mused as he watched the infant staring with fatuous solemnity at Arthur.

"Don't call it a 'thing!'" cried Lizzie, who had the baby on her lap.

"He is an immortal soul," said the schoolmaster, "and your question should be, not so much what he will make of the author of his being, as what the author of his being will make of him. The responsibility of the male parent begins a good deal sooner than most fathers imagine. In fact, having paid some attention to this subject, I say without hesitation that fathers are very prone to shirk their responsibility. Now I devote one whole hour of every day of my life to Arthur, though he is as yet not four months of age."

"Poor little devil!" said Ives.

"He loves his father," declared Lizzie. "After his father has been with him about half an hour, he always begins to say 'da-da-da,' and I know he's trying to say 'dad.'"

"More likely trying to say 'damn,'" suggested the uncle.

"Hush!" said Mr. Brown. "I beg you'll restrain yourself, Ives. It isn't fair to the child. The infant ear is extraordinarily sensitive and receptive, and the infant instinct amazingly imitative. We should strive from the earliest age to impart the habit of close thinking and a proper choice of words. You cannot commence too soon. I want the child to pick up my diction. If you begin by making the young take life seriously, the temptation to do otherwise when they grow up is not so great."

"No fear for him. He'll take life serious enough when he sees t'other childer having sweeties and toys and him only getting sermons."

Lizzie protested, but Arthur held up his hand.

"Hear me, please, Lizzie. Toys are very much misunderstood. Every toy should combine instruction with innocent amusement. This is not appreciated. Now I shall——"

It was at this juncture that Ruth arrived and she and Lizzie departed to admire the baby's distinctions in private.

Ives showed greater patience with his brother-in-law than of old, though Arthur irritated him as usual. But his counter-strokes were of a kind less elementary. He seldom swore and cursed; he uttered his own opinions on what Arthur called "serious subjects"; and they awoke the fiercest antagonism. Indeed, Ives was somewhat interested to find that, though Mr. Brown had never faltered in a cold patience before personal attack and even insult, yet he, too, could grow warm when his faith and the mainsprings of his mental and moral existence were attacked.

To please Lizzie, Ives went to church several times during the month she spent at her old home, but services lacked salt for him. He only returned when she urged it and mentioned his mother's name. He was reminded that Avisa always liked him to go; and therefore again he went. His own mental life of late had widened and

deepened; and the deeper he went the darker it became. The fountains of justice did not show themselves in the high places. He found them in man, never in God. He told Arthur Brown of this discovery and pained the schoolmaster not a little.

"If you would read the Book of books——" he said.

"I've read miles of it. Christ is all right; but He's dead, and so's charity. Died with Him, I reckon."

"Don't talk like that. Christ is not dead. He is waiting to find the way to every human heart. The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, Ives. At least it might be."

"That's bosh, Arthur."

"It is the greatest truth in the world, Ives."

The younger proceeded and explained himself so far as his vocabulary was equal to the task. Without assistance he had discovered the elementary yet neglected fact that Nature's stern disciplines are concerned with man's flesh and blood, not his soul; that she punishes the sins of life against matter, not morals. No tares were ever yet chidden by Nature for choking good wheat: she helps them to do it; the goats are her chosen not less than the sheep. He had perceived that Nature knew nothing whatever about goodness or badness, and he began to wonder whether God did either. Nature put her foot down when man broke her laws; but whether he broke his own, appeared to be a matter of perfect indifference to her.

"I suppose God made Nature," he said, "and He might have made her a bit fairer and a bit more sportsmanlike. Nature's that heartless, Arthur, that every hedge will show you things that make your blood boil. This merciful God of the sparrows ought to look after it."

"And d'you think He doesn't?" asked Brown.

"I know He doesn't," said the other. "Look at this."

He went to the mantelshelf and took from it a rabbit's skull. Some accident had overtaken the beast in life and deprived it of a tooth. The responding incisor, thus freed

from restraint and control, had slowly proceeded with growth, and finally destroyed the creature by starvation.

"Where was your God when that rabbit was dying?" said Ives.

"With the rabbit," answered Arthur stoutly. "Have no sorrow for the rabbit. These things happen and Nature does much that seems curious to our blind eyes. You might as well say, 'Where was God at the time of the great earthquake of Lisbon?' He was in the midst of it."

"Not Him—up aloft, out of harm's way, looking on at the fun! Us have got to go down when Nature hits out, but we know she's hitting below the belt time and again; we know, when she goes on the loose, like a drunken man, and sends a gale in spring and knocks all her own new handiwork to pieces, that she's not responsible. Why don't your God teach her sense? Nobody can answer that."

"We shouldn't attempt to. Such a question shows a wrong attitude. You oughtn't to think or say such things. Nature—well, Nature works by laws."

"And who made the laws? If you'd had to make 'em, would you have made 'em as they are?"

"I certainly shouldn't have made them more wisely," said Mr. Brown. "Because that would have been impossible to a finite mind."

"Then you ought to be ashamed," declared Ives hotly. "I'd have made 'em better, and if a just God had made 'em, He'd have made 'em better. My own belief is that He had nought to do with them. You'll read in Job, Arthur, that God let the Devil have a run for his money here and there, and sometimes I be of a mind to think——"

"Not the laws of Nature," declared Arthur with great conviction. "The Enemy of Mankind, or the Prince of the Air in poetical speech, is allowed to have the power to tempt mankind; but it is man who by his wickedness gave Him that power. God did not. But God would not give the Evil One power over life and death. Oh, no;

believe me, Ives, the Devil has no control over the forces of Nature."

"'Twas just a sportsmanlike idea of Moleskin's to get God out of the fix," explained Ives. "Him and me be both thinking men and great on justice in general; and we was wondering over this rabbit's head how God could reconcile it to His conscience to do such a damned cruel piece of work. We decided that God hadn't heard of it."

"All this tends to weakening of faith," said Mr. Brown. "If you, with your little finite mind, can take this attitude—but really I think, Ives, that if, instead of just taking these superficial ideas you went to the bottom of things, as I do, you would find the riddle quite easy to understand. You must read *all* that happens in the light of Divine Revelation, and in that blazing illumination everything fits into its appointed place, and we render to Nature the things that are Nature's, and unto God the things that are God's. All will be made clear, be sure of that. What looks wrong isn't really."

"And the Devil, too. What's the end of him? I asked Moleskin, and he said, 'The end of the Devil is his tail. That's all we know in this world.' As a matter of fact nobody believes in the Devil nowadays—not even parsons."

"Oh, yes, they do—all honest ones," answered Brown. "We understand the Devil better, that's all. There's a Devil and every man knows it. And you know it. If Heaven is within us, hell can be also."

Pomeroy laughed and the argument ended in some lasting annoyance on the one side and indifference on the other. Ives continued to attribute consciousness to Nature and arraign her accordingly; Mr. Brown continued to rely upon that nebulous and slovenly thinking common in the rank and file of those who allege the possession of faith; Ives continued to shock Arthur, for the pleasure of seeing him shocked; Arthur continued to afford Ives that pleasure. The younger man's attitude insensibly but

swiftly changed towards his sister's husband. Once he hated him, and now he despised him. It remained to show whether time would further modify his understanding of the schoolmaster, purify his view to pity, or even exalt it to sympathy.

"The difference between us is," he said once to Arthur, "that I know I'm going wrong three parts of my time, and I'm always feeling out after justice and something to lend me a hand, and never finding it; and that you think you're right all the time and never want to hear a wiser opinion on any subject than your own."

"The voice of man too often drowns the still small voice of the Lord; and that is the only voice I want to hear," answered Mr. Brown.

Ives saw Ruth home again after nightfall; he then kept his appointment with Jill; but the interview was shorter than she desired or intended. Her inclination tempted her to keep the famous letter; her wits told her that this would be impossible if for an instant she desired the goodwill of the man. She cursed herself very heartily for having mentioned the letter at all; but it had slipped out in presenting her case and her vigil. She felt that the pathetic spectacle of her tryst at the Windystone had impressed him; but, on the other hand, it was unfortunate that the letter must be relinquished at this moment.

Her dreams and hopes were crushed after Pomeroy had been in the house five minutes. He came for the letter and he came fresh from a rather emotional farewell. He had asked Ruth at leave-taking to walk with him in the Moor on the following Sunday, and she had agreed to do so. They planned to a meeting at Merivale Bridge, and already the man's mind was full of it, as he took his letter from Jill's hand.

"Will you come in a minute, Ives?" she asked.

"Yes, Mrs. Bolt," he answered, and the name struck

cold; "I'll come in and burn this letter at your fire, if you please. Sooner the better."

He destroyed the paper and there was a pause.

"May I fetch you a drop of cider?"

"No, thanks. And so you go back to your own people?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Yet sometimes I'm half in a mind to stop along with the old woman and see her out. She've got very little life left in her, now that her son's dead."

He looked at Jill, and she understood.

"You'll find a better man than him come presently," he said.

She made no answer but a sigh; then, after an awkward interval, he spoke again.

"I may tell you that I'm going to marry Miss Rendle very shortly."

She looked at him, and he saw her grow pale under the candle-light.

"'Twas always my mother's wish—not but what she's a powerful sight too good for me."

"No woman was ever that."

He saw tears glittering on her cheeks and rose hurriedly to depart.

"If ever I can do you a good turn, Jill," he said. Then he broke off. She buried her face in her arms on the table, and the mound of her wonderful hair shone close to the candle. From a mild and benignant spirit he leapt violently and fiercely to rage.

"God damn you all!" he said, and rushed out savagely.

His exit comforted her a good deal; she dried her eyes and still felt justified in a little hope. Such fury promised better than self-control and indifference had done. And yet her final thought that night brought back the tears again. He had said that he was going to marry Ruth Rendle, and he would not go back upon his word. She had lost him: there remained only the barren instinct of revenge. Well she knew, as all Merivale knew, that Mat-

thew Northmore hungered after Ruth, and that Northmore and Pomeroy were enemies. She strove for a plan, but could find none.

But in all innocence Matthew helped the enemies of Ives next Sunday, for the master of Vixen Tor was late at Merivale Bridge through an incident at the farm, and when he arrived, Ruth and Northmore had been talking together for half an hour. They were not at the bridge, since that spot was occupied, as often happened on Sunday afternoon, by the folk; but Ives saw them on the bank of Walla a hundred yards away. They sat together and only rose at his approach. Then, not waiting to speak with him, Northmore abruptly departed. But Ruth smiled and held out her hand.

"He kept me company till you came," she said.

"Like his blasted impudence! Won't he never learn you don't want his company, long-faced dog? 'Tis a disgrace—and to go off like that——"

"You can't expect him to—but leave him. Smooth out your forehead, Ives."

"Can't expect him to—what?"

"Oh, I don't know what I was going to say."

"Yes, you do. You meant that I couldn't expect that man to like me. More I do. All the same, to turn his back so and make me look a fool in sight of all they men on the bridge——"

Ruth seldom laughed; but now she did so and the amusement was ill-timed.

"You're on his side then?" he asked bluntly.

"I'm on no side," she said, growing grave again; "I know why you were angry with him, and I'm grateful. But—but—you see, you've threatened him and said harsh things in company. You couldn't expect the man to feel very kindly towards you."

"Keep walking," he answered. "Better leave that. I shall do more than threaten afore long."

A moody fit got hold upon him. He had started to ask her to marry him, but for the present he put any such thought out of his head. They tramped together and she tried hard to lift him up and raise his spirit; but she failed. This walk had been the dream of her week, and her heart, under cover of night, had whispered that the man would speak to her before the end of it. But now she grew faint under his silence and, just as Ives began to recover, nigh the ragged crown of Great Mis, Ruth's own spirit sank. The place and the weather braced him; they depressed her. At the critical moment, when one more cheerful speech might have brought happiness to his face again, her patience gave out.

"I'm tired and cold," she said. "'Tisn't much good tramping further, that I can see."

The sudden petulance in her voice struck Pomeroy harshly and surprised him. He did not blame himself for it. He only felt glad that he had not relaxed.

"Better rest a bit then," he said. "Then we'll go back; and I'll leave you at Stone Park, if you like."

His ferocity calmed her again.

"You oughtn't to say that."

"Sit here and look out over," he answered. "'Tis all ugly and 'twill suit us, for we'm all ugly too by the sound of our voices."

She relented a little more, and they sat without speaking and looked at the hand of late autumn working upon the waste.

A high wind laden with occasional showers flogged the Moor, hummed against the granite and set the dying herbage shivering with waves of colourless light. Upon the sallow spaces of the hills cloud shadows rolled heavily aloft, in a wild grey herd, the clouds stampeded over the blue. Here stragglers broke away and fled alone; here, afar, the masses darkened and slant rain fell from them, brightening the gloom of one mountain and dimming the

light of another. The brief colour-song of the ling had ceased; but there was rich harmony of chocolate and amber in the bogs, seeding rushes and dark peat-cuttings.

Pomeroy sat himself with his face to the utmost desolation. He turned from the fertile lowlands and let the wind buffet his left cheek, so that his eyes might reflect only the north and northeast of the wilderness. Ruth did likewise, and together they gazed very far off into the passes of Tavy and upon the dim, huge crowns of Great Links. Nigh Hare Tor Ruddyford Farm and its little grove lay like another cloud shadow; great sunlit and storm-foundered-slopes fell brokenly to the rivers; High Willhayes was not seen; but easterly the head of Fur Tor blotted the grey sky; and Devil Tor's squat front was also visible where it led to the wild ways of Dart.

The sun beat down suddenly on Ruth's brown neck and warmed her; but the caress from the sky seemed to miss the man. Rain followed, in a brief, driving spit and fury. It lasted no time and was ended almost before the woman could open her umbrella. Then sunshine roamed again over the moisture-laden miles and woke wonders of light upon them.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked.

"Trying not to think. What's the good? Nothing ever comes out of it all. If you could stick a knife into the thinking place in my head and stop the works for evermore, I should be that much happier."

"Better stick it into your heart while you're about it. Then you'll never be miserable again," she said.

He stared at the sky and then at her.

"You're right there! But that's not the sort of advice I should look to you to give."

"No—'twasn't your mother taught me that," she said.

Presently Ruth asked him to forgive her.

"I get wicked thoughts sometimes—frantic and mad.

I've tried so hard to hide them from you. But now you've catched me in one. Forgive me, Ives."

"I like you the better for being a bit desperate now and again," he answered. "It brings you nearer to such as me. All the same——"

He stopped, and silence fell again.

They talked into a placid mood presently, and only rose when darkness was at hand. Pomeroy's desire to offer marriage was for the moment suspended; and yet he loved the woman better now, in this hour of storm-laden gloaming, darkening heath and shouting wind, than ever he had loved her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PROSPECTS FOR JILL

A MONTH after her meeting with Ives and the surrender of his letter, Jill Bolt called to Mr. Codd as he was passing her cottage door, and strove to turn the conversation upon a certain theme. She spoke without any great earnestness of purpose and affected indifference, but he was quick of perception in the matter of an enemy, and swiftly brushed away her pretences. The very fact that she should again make mention of his old master to him, told Emanuel that Jill's private hopes had failed her. His first inclination was to jeer, but he changed his mind.

"Yes," he said, "I don't change, whatever females may do. I'm all of a piece in my hate of that vile chap, but at my age patience be a part of us. I'll bide my time."

"He's going to marry Ruth Rendle, he tells me."

"Told you that, did he! His mother always hungered after it, but of course he took very good care not to let her have the joy of seeing it done. Poor fool of a woman—Ruth Rendle, I mean. To take that rip, when she might have my master."

"They're not married yet."

Jill was packing a crate with a few of the things that Samuel had bought for her.

"You be going then?" he said, not answering her last remark.

"Yes—next week."

"Back to your home?"

"Yes, for the present. The old woman don't want me, but she do want the cottage, so I shall get out of it."

"You'll find another husband. I should have thought,

now you was free, that men would have jumped at you—so young and trim as you be still."

"'Twas always his way never to want what he could have. Had t'other woman been tokened, or married, he'd have been frantic for her long ago."

"If there's one thing I should like to do," said Emanuel, "'tis to get that girl for Matthew Northmore. 'Twould be killing two birds with one stone. 'Twould be pleasing my master and getting evens with that anointed scamp."

"A great idea, certainly."

"You've come round again then? I didn't know you felt like that still."

She looked calmly at Emanuel.

"Us have got to fight for ourselves against you silly men," she said. "I'm the right wife for Pomeroy, and always was, and always will be. Nobody knows it better than him. He thinks he went too far with that girl afore my husband died. Ban't outside human power to choke 'em apart yet. He cursed when he told me about it. I know what that meant. Give me a bit of time and I may get an idea."

"You'm wishful for to marry him still then?"

"Yes, I be."

Mr. Codd appeared doubtful.

"Then I don't see how you an' me can cabal against him to much purpose. I'm wishful for to mar him and give him hell; and I'll do it yet, if it takes all the strength left in my body."

"I can't explain how I feel about it. Such a man as you wouldn't understand. I don't mind how he smarts, so long as the smarting will bring him to me. Let him smart and I'll heal the smart later."

"What a gawkim you be! He won't want you to heal the wounds if he knows you made 'em!"

"That's just what he won't know."

"You're too difficult for me," declared Mr. Codd. "All

the same, if you want him smote and can think of a right way, say it. For my part I can't hit on no better thought than firing his ricks. Weather's turning properly dry and —'tis easy."

"That won't help me. Leave it a bit and see how the cat jumps. Perhaps she'll think better of taking him before the time comes. She won't be the first girl that changed her mind about Ives Pomeroy."

"Yet you could go back to the fool in cold blood!"

"Yes."

"Pomeroy wouldn't give you much better than Bolt did."

"Yes, he would—a lot. A farm's a farm, and he stands to work now and be going on well."

"If he treated his wife no better than his work-people, you'd have a poor time of it, and go down to the pit a miserable woman."

"I could manage him all right if once I got him."

"Too late if he'm tokened to t'other. She won't give him up. Better not think of that."

"You can leave that side to me," said Jill; "a woman's pretty quick where she feels a big interest, like what I do in Pomeroy. Give me a week; then I'll come up to Stone Park and have a tell with you one day when Northmore's out of the way. Do he live alone still?"

"Yes—till the new man and his wife come a few weeks hence. He's hunting over to Tavistock presently; Thursday week. So, when he's away, you can walk over and say what you've thought about it."

A figure stood at the door and the shrunken shadow of Rachel Bolt fell on the threshold. She had much aged and was little more than a bent and sad-eyed ghost. Even the old woman's voice had grown more feeble and more mournful in its cadence.

"Come in, mother," said Jill kindly. "'Tis only Mr. Codd lending a hand with my packing."

"But I must be off now," announced Emanuel. "Good-evening to you, Mrs. Bolt. So you are to lose Jill?"

"Not to lose her. She'll come and see me as long as I be here—for love of Samuel—won't you, Jill?"

"So I shall then—scores and scores of times. And once you get back in here, you'll feel better and stronger far."

Emanuel went his way and Rachel shook her head.

"Pray God it won't be long. I've only got one thing to say beside the Lord's Prayer now when I get down on my knees; and that be to ask the Almighty to let Samuel be the angel that comes to fetch me. The joy of that! And it can be done. All things are possible with the Almighty. Such an angel as he be now—such a——"

"Yes, yes. See here, mother. I've left them vases on the mantelshelf; because he was special fond of 'em; and the pictures I be going to leave also, because the paper's faded round 'em, and 'twill spoil the room to move them."

"'Tis very good of you, Jill, and like his great heart and like the things he taught you to do and think. His old mother was a lot to that man. But these kind things you be saying make it so much harder to tell what I've come to tell."

"You want something else of his?"

"Only one thing. I'll let all the rest go gladly—all. I've longed and longed for it ever since I got back my reason, but I couldn't bring myself to beg for it. 'Tis almost too much, I'm afraid."

Jill shrugged her shoulders.

"I've never refused nothing, mother."

"You haven't; but this is different. 'Tis greedy of me—even his mother—to ask for it. Yes, 'tis too great a thing."

"If you mean the cottage, you be going to have it and live in it for the rest of your life. I can't do no more than that surely?"

"'Tisn't the cottage, and I shall pay proper rent for

the cottage like anybody else would. Samuel would have wished it—such a just man as him and honourable to a half-penny. Four shillings a week will you have, so long as I live. But there's something more by far than that."

"Say it, then. If 'tis in my power——"

"You say that because you can't guess I'd be so bold. But—well—it must out. I was wondering if just for my lifetime—of course to come back to you after——"

Still she hesitated and sniffed and grew tearful. But Jill had learned patience since Samuel's death and did not hurry her.

"Don't take on, there's an old dear. We understand each other very well now, I'm sure. Never a word since dear Samuel went home."

"No, no, never a word. You did all mortal woman could, and was much, much more of a comfort to him than them two grand nurses, I'm sure."

"Don't be frightened to say it, then. 'Tis granted before you ax, if in my power."

"In a word—the flute—his li'l, precious flute, Jill. D'you think you could do it? Be it too much? But if you only knowed what a sad, blessed joy 'twould be to me——"

Jill secretly thanked Heaven that she had not burned the flute; but she distinctly remembered the intention to do so when examining Samuel's possessions after the funeral.

"Why, of course you can have it, my dear. I don't know where 'tis for the minute; but 'tis safe enough, no doubt."

The old mother's eyes grew round through her tears.

"'Safe!' My God!" she half whispered.

Then she thanked Jill humbly and implored her to seek at once for the flute. They hunted together and Rachel herself discovered it. The scrap of wood her son's lips and fingers had so often pressed was dusty and dirty. It

had been thrust into a cupboard and forgotten. Now Rachel cleaned it with her apron and, when Jill's back was turned, kissed it and pressed it to her cheek.

"'Twill come back to you when I'm taken," she said. "Have no fear for that."

"I don't want it, mother. It shall go in your coffin with you, if you like."

"A very beautiful and generous thought in you, Jill. Maybe he'd have wished it. And thank you—words can't thank you; but I'll pray down thanks; and he'll be pleased about it where he is."

She kissed Jill and then went away with her riches; but the younger widow's packing was destined to be still further interrupted, for a man came to the door and knocked five minutes after her mother-in-law had departed. In the dusk she did not recognize him. Then he spoke and she knew the voice.

"I'll get a lamp, Mr. Toop. Be so kind as to step in," said Jill. "No doubt 'tis about the stone that you be come."

"It is," he admitted, "and for other reasons likewise."

He entered, put his hat on the table and brought some papers out of his pocket.

"Business first," said Mr. Toop; "and pleasure afterwards. At least 'twill be my pleasure."

"Let's hear that, then. I haven't had much pleasure in my life."

"Oh, 'twas nothing—only my wish to lend you a hand if you'd allow of it. The things—the boxes and such like. I wanted to say as I shall be very pleased to send round Bob and my cart and move them for you to Sampford Spiney free gratis and for nothing."

"Really you mean that, Mr. Toop?"

"Really I do, Mrs. Bolt—or Jill, if I may call you so."

"I can't refuse—too poor," she said. "But I'm afraid 'tis money out of your pocket to do it."

"That and more I'd do—however, since you're agreeable to it, let me know just when you want the cart and it shall be here. I'll even come myself to see all's vitty."

"'Tis terrible kind, Mr. Toop."

"Say nothing to nobody, Jill. 'Tis my little affair. Not a word to my brother. Joel's grown rather acid of late, along of his shortness of breath. But as for me I grow younger rather than older. I catch myself whistling like a boy, and have to stop myself a dozen times a day and remember my calling."

She nodded, looked at his sturdy body, his eyes behind their glasses, his bald head and great snuff-stained beard. He might be elderly, but there was something masculine, solid, safe about him. Romance, indeed, perished in the atmosphere of Peter Toop; but Jill felt that she had enjoyed enough romance of late years and found it unsatisfying. Moreover, there was something absolutely romantic in this offer to take her boxes home for nothing. It represented about fifteen shillings' worth of pure romance, or possibly more.

"I don't see that you grow older," she said.

"Thank you for that kind word. I've had enough to make me here and there; and to see Joel going down the hill is a sad spectacle, day in, day out. Then there's the business of people's coffins and all the living among black-clad, broken-hearted fellow-creatures. Still, as you're good enough to say, Jill, I keep young and feel young. Lord knows what I should have been in a lively walk of life—as merry as David afore the ark, I reckon."

"You're the handsomest man in Merivale whether or no," she said.

"Come, come; I'm afraid that's only said out of kindness."

"I do feel kind to you, and so I ought to feel. But 'tis only truth to say you'm a fine man and bear your years light."

Peter breathed heavily.

"If I said you was the handsomest woman, 'twould be only what everybody knows. I'm very sorry you're going."

"Must look round for work to do. About this here stone to Samuel?"

"I'll see you again before you're off, Jill. But now to business, as you very properly remind me. Well, his dear mother wanted half the Bible put on the monument; but I've had to explain there's a right and wrong way with such things. Finally she've come down to two texts and a verse out of a hymn. Too much for the stone; still it leaves a place for anything you might like to say."

"Put 'Gone, but not forgotten,'" said Jill. "That's true enough, and that's all I've got to say. I never shall forget him, poor man."

Mr. Toop uttered a great expiration of breath.

"It won't offend you if I take a pinch?" he asked.

"Not in the least. I don't mind a little snuff in the air."

"There's sense!" he said. "For my part I hold that it sweetens a room and purifies the atmosphere of the air something wonderful. You say 'Gone, but not forgotten.' Well, Jill, I wouldn't put that."

"Why not?"

"'Tis true enough—now. But all the same 'tis a sort of challenge and might be quoted against you when you take your next. Your heart won't forget him; but I should not carve such a thing in stone."

"How is it likely I can forget?"

"Memory's a wonderful antic. It does things you'd never believe. You'm only how many years old—twenty-eight, perhaps?"

"I'm twenty-six."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure; a hole in my manners to put on two years like that."

"It's natural. I've felt fifty of late, what with his death and one thing and another. I'm old for my years. Rivers of tears I've wept this year—oceans and rivers of 'em. I don't suppose I shall marry again."

"You must cheer up, my dear, if you'll pardon the freedom. You must cheer up and remember where he is now. Such a musicker as he was—why, heaven will be the very delight of his days, and he'll take his place along with the sackbuts and dulcimers and all kinds of music, no doubt, and surpise some of 'em, I dare say, when they put a heavenly flute in his hand. And as to you not marrying, he was far too sensible a man ever to wish that."

"Well, I won't put that then, if you're against it, as you seem to be. I'll put what you please."

"Leave it to me. There's texts that don't commit a body and can't be brought up again whatever happens. I'll find something affectionate, Jill, and at the same time guarded, such as 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away.' Leave it to me. I'll run through the Book and come over again to-morrow evening."

"I'm sure I don't see why you should take such a dreadful deal of trouble for a poor, friendless woman like me."

"I'm proud to do it. Now, can I lend a hand with that box, or can't I?"

"No, thank you."

"Then I'll go. Don't you take on. You've had plenty of trials in your life, but a good time may be coming."

"I'm not hopeful of that, Mr. Toop. I come of an unlucky family."

He went his way through the darkness and she stood and watched him depart. He walked firmly and whistled loudly as he went. The whistle reminded Jill of Samuel's flute, but she liked it better. There was something more masculine about it. Peter as a possible husband flashed upon her. The idea was absolutely new; but, characteristically, Jill now pondered the possibility with neither

relish nor distaste. Mr. Toop would mean riches beyond the height of her ambition; he would also probably mean widowhood while she was still in possession of some feminine glories. She rated him as a well-preserved man of sixty-five, or perhaps a little less. He might last for ten or even fifteen years. His ambition to find a wife was well known. She sat far into that night weighing the disadvantages.

Peter, meantime, whistled himself home and, half-way between *The Jolly Huntsmen* and Jill's cottage, met Joel coming in the opposite direction.

"What the deuce be you chittering and twittering about, like a starling, all to yourself?" asked Peter's brother.

"Nought—nought," answered the undertaker. "Just thinking, in my even way, that 'tis an ill wind blows good to none."

"Who's dead now, then?"

"Nobody for the minute, I hope. My mind was occupied with the living and not the dead, Joel."

"Not Widow Bolt, I should hope?"

But Peter prevaricated, an art Joel's brutal and sudden assaults had long taught him to perfect.

"What a man you are for wild ideas. Widow Bolt! Bless your life, Joel, she wouldn't look at me, nor yet you. The truth is, the girls begin to regard us both as men of middle-age tending to old, and fixed to the bachelor state. 'Tisn't flattering, but we must face it."

CHAPTER XXXVII

A MATCHBOX

TIME and chance combined to precipitate the cloudy ferocity of Mr. Codd and make his long delayed revenge a practical thing. There came a dawn when he found himself no nearer his purpose than usual; but before midnight the deed was done and a punishment far above Emanuel's highest flight of inspiration planned for Ives. That it involved villainy on his own part was true; but the old man did not stop to consider. Only after the fever of that day was dead, came leisure to examine his performance; and then he smothered conscience very easily by thinking upon Pomeroy in the past and the many outrages that he had suffered at his hands.

There came a time towards December when east winds blew and the world was dried again after autumnal torrents. Harsh currents of air had swept the wilderness for many days, when on a certain morning, Emanuel Codd sat under the west side of a haystack at Stone Park and waited for Jill Bolt. The meeting was planned with deliberation, because upon this day Matthew Northmore had gone from home to Tavistock. He proposed to hunt with the Lamerton Hounds, off Dartmoor, and make Tavistock his headquarters for two nights. A hind and his wife were daily expected at Stone Park to take the place of servants who had gone; but the new-comers had not yet arrived and for the moment Codd was in sole charge.

Now he smoked and waited for Jill, who had promised to see him there at midday. She did not, however, immediately arrive, and Emanuel, rising to see if Mrs. Bolt

was on the road, jumped suddenly to observe a very different person approaching Stone Park.

Ives Pomeroy appeared. He was riding and presently opened the gate with his hunting crop and entered. Codd did not move from his seat under the stack until Ives had lifted his voice and loudly called him thrice. Then he came forward with surly indifference.

"What d'you want?" he said. "Mr. Northmore's to Tavistock."

"I know that: 'tis the reason I'm here—to have a few words with you."

"I'd sooner talk to any other man."

Ives laughed with the consciousness of one who brings good news unexpectedly. He could take liberties even with the ferocious Codd, because he brought with him news that must make the ancient amiable.

"You wait till you hear what the few words be, my old blackguard. Where's a place out of the wind? Don't look as if you fed on sloans. I'm your master no more; but I don't want to be your enemy."

"You'll be my enemy till you or me go to our graves."

"Sit down and smoke," answered Ives. "You've found a snug place, I see. It all fits in quite well; Northmore out of the way, and you alone, and me on my way up over to see that man, Gregory Friend, at the Amicombe Hill peatworks. So here I am."

He tethered his horse, took a seat with his back to the rick, and made Codd sit down beside him.

"I've learned something of late," he said.

"There's a lot for you to larn. Your mother's son might have larned justice if nought else."

"You've hit it first shot. My mother's son did ought to be a just man, I'll grant you. I've thought about different matters since you came here, and been in a pretty good rage off and on to see what scant justice is about in the world."

"Look at home."

Ives laughed, opened his tobacco pouch, and filled his pipe.

"You take the words out of my mouth. 'Twas at home I did look after being mighty vexed with the way of things everywhere else. And, seeing what I saw, I found out, partly, why I'd been in such a deuce of a temper of late days. I did a wrong thing backalong; but I've been a lot better in my mind since I decided up my mind to right it."

"'Twill take you all your time to right the wrong things you've done."

The other lighted his pipe. Then he put his hand into his pocket, brought out a few papers and selected one from among them.

"I've been going into figures. Touching your pension, Emanuel, I let my own feelings have too much play. I gave you as little as I could; I forgot that 'twas my mother's wish to pension you and I forgot how you looked in her eyes. Her will left it to me. I wasn't worthy of that trust, Codd, when I threw you off in a tantrum."

"No, you never was worthy of being trusted by anybody."

"Perhaps not; but what's done can be altered sometimes. I'm going to raise your pension, because I know well I'm under the figure my mother would have wished for you."

"Yes, a cruel long way under."

Pomeroy showed a little irritation at these uncompromising replies. Then he proceeded.

"That's granted—in reason. Well, I'll mend it."

"If you mean justice and not only to talk and take credit, you'll have to go back to the beginning—I suppose you'd thought of that. The pension—a pittance rather than a pension—have been going on now a good few months."

"You're an ungrateful brute, Codd—a curst, crabbed heart in you—like a wolf. No kindness will ever tame you."

"Not your sort of kindness. You want me to go down on my knees and thank you for this and tell you that you're a fine fellow and worthy of Avisa Pomeroy's memory and all the rest. Well, I ban't going to do it. I've been a just man these sixty years—just to all and honest as the light. But nobody ever thanked me for being so straight. Nobody's ever thanked in this world for doing their duty—rare though it is; and because it's been put into you to do your duty towards me, I'm not going to thank you, so you needn't think it."

Ives felt his heart grow hot and the old loathing for Emanuel, stilled of late by absence, burnt up in him again.

"So much for that, then. You're getting—what is it—two shillings and six a week, aren't you?"

"Yes, six pounds odd a year for fifty years of sleepless service!"

"I'll make it seven shillings. A shilling a day for the rest of your life, Codd."

"Justice—eh? And then you'll go up hill and down dale and tell 'em what a damned fine man you be, and what a Godsend to the poor!"

This was too much for Ives. He leapt to his feet and lost his temper so that Codd went in fear of a thrashing. Pomeroy cursed him heartily, declared that he would stop the pension altogether, and then departed, so blind with passion that he could hardly mount his horse. Codd watched him gallop off over Lone Stone hill and hoped that the young man would break his neck before that day was done. Then he reflected upon his own performance and perceived that he had made a fool of himself. Lust to smite and hurt his enemy mastered him. He longed at that moment to go forth and fire the man's

ricks or hough his cattle. He had lost a shilling a day for a pure enmity, and nobody would pity him when the truth was known. In cold blood he well knew that a shilling a day was exceedingly handsome and that all men would say so. But he had insulted the giver and sacrificed the gift.

Upon the frenzy of malignity awakened by these considerations came Jill Bolt. Ives had not been gone half an hour before she filled his place, sat in the seat under the rick, and turned over in her hand a matchbox that he had forgotten in his abrupt and furious departure.

"'Twas given him long time agone by Ruth Rendle," said Mr. Codd. "He must have been in a proper tantara to have left that. And he forgot his papers, too."

Jill picked them up, then put them down again after brief examination.

"A bill and a letter from that woman at Tavistock."

"Ruth?"

"Yes."

"That's where the wind sets now and be softening the hard heart of the man. I've just had a proper row with him afore you came. Rode up as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and offered me a shilling a day instead of fourpence! I tried to get him to be honest and named his mother to him; and that made him mad. I expected his horse-whip round me, old though I am."

"Where's he gone to?"

"To Amicombe Hill, to the peatworks."

"When will he come back?"

"After nightfall, no doubt."

She reflected. The means to do an evil deed lay under her hand, and, albeit in the light of possible prosperity elsewhere, Jill's enmity against Pomeroy waned, yet it was not dead and she felt little prick of remorse to strike her now. Codd made her thought easy of utterance.

"For two pins I'd go down to-night, after dusk, afore the man comes back, and fire his big stack."

"There's a better way," she said. "Everything be ripe and ready, if so be you're still set on reading him a lesson. What d'you want to fire his rick for? Fire this one that we're sitting under! Here's paper and matches all ready for you."

"What's the sense of that?"

"D'you need to ask? You're dull. Why, haven't you got the place to yourself and his papers and his box of matches in your hand? Pretty tidy proofs—eh?"

Emanuel stared and the point of the enterprise slowly forced itself into his mind.

"You mean that they'll think as he have done it?"

"Why not? He's up this way and will come back this way after dark. He knows that Northmore is at Tavistock. You see the fire and find his box o' matches and burnt paper next morning, or leave 'em somewhere for others to find. This east wind will take the fire from the rick to yon shippon. There may be a beast or two burned. You find 'tis flaming and come running out, too late to do anything. Why, the man would get five years or more if it all went right. The devil's self couldn't have planned anything neater. You spread a bit of fire to-night, my old boy, and see 'tis well on light afore you go to bed. Who can blame you. 'Twill warm you every time you think of it afterwards."

"What about Northmore?"

"'Tis doing him a rare good turn, too. Once that chap's cooling his heels in clink, all's clear for Northmore with Ruth. You want to bring 'em together more than anything in the world, for you told me so. If Ives be put away, she'll very likely take him, and he'd very gladly pay more than the price of a rick and a shippon for her."

"You're a wonderful woman," said Codd. "To think

as that flashed afore your mind so lightning quick. Leave the rest to me. I'm no fool neither. You look out of your winder after eight o'clock to-night, and you'll see more than moonlight. Everything be like tinder."

"And mind you put the matchbox and the papers away in a safe place, Emanuel. The plan will be to twist up the papers and let 'em be a bit burned, as though he'd made a fire with 'em."

"Trust me."

"If you could tell about when he'll be coming back along, 'twould help you for time."

"I must chance that. I shall make the fire somewheres about eight o'clock and then go to bed. 'Twill be seen from Merivale and the folk will come up and rouse me."

"Everybody's heard him say a lot of things against Northmore."

"Yes, they have, and against every other honest man. 'Tis just the thing he would do. I most wonder he haven't done it afore now."

"He'll have done it by this time to-morrow," said Jill coolly. "He's known for a dashing and a reckless chap. He's seen the inside of prison afore to-day. 'Tis well in keeping with the man to do it. Everybody will believe it against him; Northmore so quick as any."

"Us must bring it out very cunning," declared Mr. Codd. "I shall find these here things to windward of the hayrick and take 'em straight to master. Us can leave him very safely to do the rest."

"No, no! that would mar all, because everybody knows you hate the man. Put the things where Northmore will find 'em for himself. Let the paper be half burned, as though he'd lighted it and it had gone out. But don't you meddle in it. 'Tis enough you see your master finds all."

They parted then, and Jill returned to Merivale. She felt in some uneasiness, yet cared not much what might happen. Ives was no longer for her, but whether she

would presently resent that fact, or accept it with indifference, remained to be seen. It depended largely on Peter Toop. She kept a cold-blooded and an open mind for the moment. She had certainly not planned this villainy against her old sweetheart but for accident. The whole apparatus thrust itself under her nose and cried to be used against him. She felt that in any case his past behaviour deserved punishment; but her own future was interesting her a great deal at this moment, and she would not have troubled about Ives, or thought twice concerning Emanuel's grievance, but for the accident of the matchbox and the papers.

She was standing at her cottage door that night at eight o'clock with Peter Toop. He expatiated upon his growing fortune, his vigorous health, and the general advantages he enjoyed. She half listened while her eyes strained upon the darkness of the Moor. Then light twinkled across it and flashed. A red star appeared and seemed steadily to grow. Mr. Toop was too intent upon his own affairs to mark this circumstance for some time. He had his back turned to the valley under Great Mis Tor, and did not see the light. Then a man ran past and called his attention to it.

"Something wrong at Stone Park," he said. "There's fire there."

Peter turned and screwed up his eyes.

"Where's Codd to?" he asked.

"Up there, no doubt. But what good will he be? The house is afire by the look of it."

Mr. Toop bade Jill good-night and hastened down the hill. A quarter of an hour later, with half a dozen other men, he set out over the Moor and proceeded as fast as possible through the night to Stone Park.

Moleskin, Joel, and Rupert Johnson were of the company, and with them hastened several labourers and a dozen boys.

"The man's away," said Mr. Cawker. "There's nobody there at all but old Codd."

"So like as not they've knocked him on the head and set the place afire to hide their crime," suggested Joel. "Northmore's always good for twenty or thirty pound in cash, and some bad characters have got to know it."

"As for Codd, I know of no man us could better spare," began Moleskin; then he was interrupted by the sound of a galloping horse and Moleskin changed his speech tc a yell, for in another moment he must have been ridden down.

"Hold on! Hold on! Who is it? Be that you, Emanuel?" he shouted.

Then Pomeroy pulled up, and his weary beast stretched its legs, put its head down and panted.

"You're too late, boys. Rick's gone and the shippon, too. Poor damned things in it squealing like hell; but I couldn't let 'em out. I've burnt myself as 'tis, trying."

"Who be up there?"

"Not a soul. I bawled, but couldn't make none hear. That knave Codd ought to be there if he haven't come to grief. Us may save a bit; but the rick's done for and the little rick, fifty yards off, is afire, too."

He returned with them, and through the dark, dry silence of night they soon heard the fire roaring. The roof of the shippon had fallen in, and the animals that it contained were dead. Through smoke and smother came the sharp stench of roasting flesh.

"'Tis the man's three pedigree heifers!" cried Joel Toop. "What a cruel calamity! The hay was nought to that."

All worked amain to circumscribe and stamp out the fire. Then suddenly shrill cries arose and in the fitful light appeared the spectacle of Emanuel Codd hanging out of an attic window on the roof of the farm. He was illu-

minated in flashes of intermittent fire and became invisible between them.

"For God sake, save me, souls!" he yelled.

"Come down, you old fool!" roared Moleskin. "You're safe enough; the farm's not touched and the fire's got under."

Then Emanuel descended in his night-shirt and night-cap only. They sent him back to dress, and by the time that he had done so the fire was nearly out.

Much damage had been done, and Codd, who was in a condition of great excitement and collapse, refused to stop alone through the night. All stayed for some time to see that no fire broke forth again; and then the main company, much reinforced since the beginning of the tragedy, returned to Merivale, while Mr. Peter Toop and Rupert Johnson, as responsible men, stopped with Codd until the morning.

Ives was the centre of interest, though he could tell the people little. He had marked the fire far away on his homeward journey, and hastened his horse when he perceived it. But, once arrived at Stone Park, he found himself too late to be of service. He supposed the place empty and had therefore galloped forward as fast as a tired horse could take him, to give the alarm.

Many theories of the catastrophe were advanced, but only that of Ives Pomeroy himself came indirectly near the truth.

"I was past here this morning and saw that old fool smoking his pipe in the hay yard. So like as not he's the cause of this job. But of course he'll swear different."

"'Tis a terrible bad stroke," declared Moleskin. "My heart bleeds for them beautiful young beasts. They had 'Charles I.' for a sire, and they would have been worth their weight in gold some day."

"Let the man smart, and be damned to him," answered Pomeroy. "'Tis his turn, ban't it? I'm not sorry,

for my part. Shows he'm not bullet-proof more than his neighbours. If it do bend his stiff neck a bit——"

But Moleskin reproved these sentiments.

"Mustn't say that now. 'Twas so once; but he's a reformed character of late, and ban't for our side to speak against him or wish him ill. Drinks as hard as the best of us now. And set madly on a girl, too. What more can you ax of any honest man?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ARSON

A TELEGRAM on the following morning informed Matthew Northmore of his bad fortune, and an element of superstition in the man received the news with equanimity. From the first he associated the catastrophe with Ruth. He could not explain to himself this impression, but it existed, and looking back, long afterwards, he marvelled as at a miracle. For there seemed no ground in reason why the fate of the girl should be influenced by the destruction of his rick and pedigree calves.

Codd had first word with Northmore on the day that followed the fire; and he lied in a manner to deceive any man. His tale was natural and contained nothing to arouse the least suspicion; but Emanuel reserved his masterstroke until later in the day, because he knew that Ives would come to speak with Matthew, and he desired to do nothing definite until Pomeroy had visited Stone Park and left it.

The interview between the farmers was not a long one. The elder proved cold and indifferent; he barely thanked Ives for his great efforts at the fire, and showed no particular interest in the details. Pomeroy, quick to catch the opposing mood, on his side, let his eagerness wane. He told how he had seen the fire from the Moor and made haste to no purpose. It was not until he mentioned his conversation with Codd during the previous morning that Northmore felt interested.

"He said that you stopped a few minutes and then lost your temper and cussed and swore at me and a few more people; then went your way."

"He lies as usual. I cussed and swore at him, as well I might—the knave; but at none else. I talk to people's faces, not behind their backs. I offered the man to increase his pension to a shilling a day, because it came over me that I'd given him less than my mother might have willed. That's why I stopped. Then he turns round and spits out his gall like a gallied snake and cries for more! Who wouldn't curse the fool?"

"He said that you threatened to be level with me again."

"I never named your name. He said you was from home, and I said I knew it, and that's why I had stopped to talk a moment. But I'm not here now to answer to you for anything, I believe. I worked like ten men to help dout the fire, and if you've got nought but frosty looks, may you do better next time yourself, and burn your hands to the elbows as I did yesterday. A bit ago, when I came in this room, I was full sorry I hadn't ridden down over Dartymoor an hour sooner, so as I might at least have waked that old rascal and saved your calves. Now I don't care a rap, and I'm glad you've suffered. You don't deserve to be luckier than the rest of us. And if you want to know how this fell out, you needn't look further than Emanuel Codd. He was sitting against the ricks smoking yesterday, and 'twas he that burnt you out, be sure of that. So good-night to you."

In a hot mood Ives departed, and this incident served long to cast him back into the old slough of turmoil and mental unquiet. Again his sense of justice was outraged, and he stormed inwardly to think that Northmore could place greater reliance upon Codd's word than on his own. Had he guessed what was happening in secret, Pomeroy might have taken swift steps before it was too late; but not until many days had passed, did he learn of the things conceived and plotted against him, and by that time their consequences could not be evaded.

Mr. Codd heard Ives depart after his interview with Matthew Northmore; and then his master called him.

"Pomeroy says that he never mentioned my name yesterday, and that, when he called, you were sitting smoking beside the stack."

"Like him!—the craft and malice of that man! It's a lie. 'Twas him that smoked on the lew side o' the stack, and I warned him against it."

Mr. Codd affected great excitement and indignation. Then the thing happened that he desired and Northmore went out on to the farm.

The trap was set. From under the edge of a haystack, to the rear of that destroyed by fire, a piece of paper peeped. Codd saw his master stoop and pick it up. Then he hastened out of sight.

Not until after dark did the old man venture in the direction of the lure. Then he found that his bait had vanished.

Matthew, meantime, explained this discovery to himself. The papers had been thrust beneath the stack and so escaped observation. Then had come a current of air and blown this out under his eyes. It was clear that he who set the papers there alight had counted on their destruction in the conflagration of the second rick; but the torch had gone out too soon and the hay escaped.

Fifty years earlier, so Northmore reflected, Ives Pomeroy would have been hanged for his night's work. He pieced the plot carefully, saw his enemy return after dark, set the farm on fire, lie hidden until all was ablaze past extinction, and then pretend to discover the catastrophe and gallop off to bring succour.

For a time the excitement of this revelation took Northmore out of himself. His indignation mastered him. He considered his burnt beasts, and he raged a while and determined that this villainy should meet a just reward. It was notorious that Pomeroy had threatened to do him

great harm, and here, at the first safe opportunity, he had kept his promise.

Northmore acted in wrath, and Mr. Codd, creeping about close at hand, was not astonished to hear himself called. He appeared before his master, and Northmore spoke:

"Go to Merivale police station; see Inspector Bachelor and tell him I want him."

Codd peered about stealthily, but the evidences of Pomeroy's guilt were not visible.

"The inspector—have 'e got a clue?" he asked eagerly.

But Matthew was not prepared to share confidence with Emanuel.

"Go at once and don't chatter," he answered; so Mr. Codd departed.

"They'll take him to-night," reflected Emanuel. "I must get downalong again on some errand. I wouldn't miss it for money!"

His legs went swiftly as he hurried off to Merivale; but the mind of Northmore travelled still faster, and ere the aged sinner had got half-way to his destination his master's determinations were altered. Indeed Matthew soon felt surprised to think that, even for a moment, he could have lost sight of what this might mean. The old intuition that had flashed across his mind when first the ill news came, returned now; the riddle was read; he saw the immense possibilities of this incident staring out very clearly at him. His human instinct was to leap forward and complete all before reason, honour, and his sense of right had leisure to sway him. He saw the coveted flower beside his path, and he believed that he had now but to put forth his hand and pluck it. Yet between him and the treasure there lay a foul pit, and he hesitated for a moment before plunging through it. The problem promised to be one of very simple proportions; but he could not decide in a moment. Indeed, after the first feverish lust to leave no moment wasted before he should reach

Ruth, he relapsed into a lethargy. He brought forth the matchbox and papers again, and was sitting motionless staring at them, when Codd and Inspector Bachelor returned.

Then Matthew acted with celerity and, at the first sound of their voices, he concealed the property of Ives Pomeroy and securely locked it up.

The interview that followed was widely different from any that Emanuel Codd imagined. Indeed, nothing of interest transpired, and Northmore, far from bringing any charges, or endeavouring to incriminate his enemy, never mentioned him save in one connexion.

"When young Pomeroy came to tell me what he knew this afternoon," explained Matthew, "he said that he saw my own man, Codd, sitting smoking against the identical rick that was burned. I tell you this that you may remember there is a possible sort of explanation, apart from any idea of arson."

"So Pomeroy told me. 'Twas said this morning in the yard when I was here, and Codd got very short and answered 'twas a lie of Pomeroy's made up to harm him."

They discussed the incident from every possible point of view, and the inspector was bound to confess that as yet no clue had been secured. A tramp, who slept overnight in a ruined shepherd's hut near Merivale, had been arrested during the day; but he was liberated after examination.

"You'll never find it out," foretold Northmore. "For my part I have felt this thing would be a mystery from the first. It is just bad luck, and, though the fire will always be associated with Codd, I do not blame him in the least. Indeed, I feel positive he is not responsible."

"Are you insured?"

"The hay, yes. Not the cattle unfortunately."

Inspector Bachelor went his way; then Codd appeared,

hopeful that some news might await him; but Northmore disappointed the plotter and bade him go to bed.

Instead, however, the old man crept off again to Merivale with his ears hollowed to catch a breath of news. But nothing was said, nothing was known. At *The Jolly Huntsmen* a theory gained ground that Mr. Codd himself had accidentally and stupidly done all the damage.

His master, meantime, still sat in his room with the door locked. Great questions asked themselves in Northmore's brain, and he could not answer them.

Should Ruth hear of this? What line would she take? The truth none could reasonably doubt upon his evidence, and the punishment of such a performance would not be less than five years' penal servitude. Such a sentence must be another name for ruin. Even as his own great opportunity dawned out of this welter, like a red sun out of a snow-cloud, Northmore had time to be astonished that any man, for hunger of sating his evil passion, could thus face destruction. None he had ever known, excepting only Ives, were built on a mental plan to commit such wicked folly. Northmore tried to consider the position from the point of view of Pomeroy, and he made the worst case possible against himself; but allowing for everything, he could find no grounds sufficient for this rascality. Then he thought of Ruth Rendle; and the suspected performance of his enemy, seen by that light, assumed more reasonable proportions. Pomeroy's attitude to Ruth had surely changed and he was now jealous. Past words and threats all began to look reasonable and orderly upon such an explanation; and yet Northmore asked himself again and again how Ives could for an instant be jealous of so futile a rival. But possibly Pomeroy did not know that his rival was in reality so weak; perchance he thought that Ruth still lingered in two minds; perhaps he suspected that the increased prosperity of Northmore was inclining the girl towards him. This stroke might

be explained in that manner. From which point Northmore even dared to wonder whether Ruth might not be changing.

He thought all through the night, and he came to a fixed purpose that he would be a fool to neglect this amazing opportunity. Three lives were threatened, and anon, with sophistry, he proved to his own satisfaction that the course he proposed to take was absolutely the right one and best calculated to advance the welfare of these involved souls. He spun a great web and caught himself hard and fast. He decided that Pomeroy was proved utterly and hopelessly unsuited to be Ruth's husband, even if he now had reached the point of desiring to be; and he satisfied himself that, rather than let Ives suffer penal servitude, Ruth would—— There he allowed his thoughts to push him no further in that direction, but turned to other points of view.

He rested but two hours and slept not at all. At dawn he rose, made a meal, and bade Codd saddle his horse. Life stood still with him until this vital matter was done. All looked reasonable in the sunshine, as he rode to Tavistock and smoothed out his crumpled thoughts of the preceding night; but he could not tell how his proposals might sound uttered aloud in the presence of Ruth.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE ORDEAL

THE storm-driven Northmore fought long, and lost. Self-respect and justice went down before this temptation, and a nature, sapped of late by the strain and nervous fever begot of passion, found itself not strong enough to resist. The circumstances of his case were peculiar and unfortunate, for Ruth's refusal could not extinguish his fires. The man appeared incapable of relinquishing her and lacked resource to harden himself against this blow and seek elsewhere. Blindly, dumbly he clove to her; vainly he hoped. But the futility of such comportment drove in upon him during his saner hours; and then, that he might fight the tremendous depression awakened by a just view of his conduct, he sought wherewith to drown the truth and threatened to become intemperate. That phase had passed, so men believed; but they were mistaken: Northmore for the space of a year had drunk alone. None ever saw him intoxicated and to that point he did not reach; but he took enough to numb his innate characteristics; his will had weakened from the time that he began to love Ruth; and now, in the hour of this mighty temptation, he succumbed. Indeed many arguments of great sufficiency presented themselves and battled with conscience. Only Ruth herself was the difficulty; but, as he rode to Tavistock, he slurred over that aspect of the moment. Let her marry him, and the sequel would show that she had done wisely, and that he had done well to force her. He believed in all honesty that the world had yet to see such a husband as he would make. Moreover, since Pomeroy was proved a barefaced and deliberate rascal, the sooner Ruth

knew it, the better. Her own welfare must be vitally involved, and he now felt that nothing would be more fatal for her than union with the master of Vixen Tor.

At the bottom of all his convictions moved an instinct struggling for life; but he gave no heed to that. He appreciated it to the extent of mental discomfort, but he told himself fiercely that this was not conscience, but a vague folly bred of his sportsman's ideas—a hunting man's erroneous notion of fairness. He felt uncertain whether the thing he meant to do might be considered sportsmanlike. And then he remembered his cattle and banished this last scruple. The man who deliberately burnt live animals to gratify a spirit of revenge, might well be counted beyond the pale of all sporting consideration. Pomeroy deserved worse than the world would mete to him.

At this stage in his progress, Matthew almost doubted, after all, if his plans might not miscarry. Ruth, perhaps, would feel as he did; Ruth, remembering how the mother of Ives behaved on an occasion of the past, might refuse his proposition and raise no obstacle between Pomeroy and his just punishment. But this suspicion vanished; he knew her too well for that, and too well he knew all that she felt for Pomeroy. No, the enterprise was safe enough. Ruth would never let the man go to prison if she could prevent it. She would give herself to Northmore rather —a very willing sacrifice. Herein lay the sting of his intention. The word "sacrifice" ran in his head and maddened him. He spurred his horse and galloped hard to distract his thoughts. Only by keeping his mind steadfastly fixed on the future could this present deed be endured.

It was still early when he reached Tavistock, and Ruth showed much surprise at his appearance. He asked for a few minutes of private conversation and she was able to grant them. They occupied a little public parlour behind

the shop, where visitors drank tea. The place was secluded and empty. Ruth lighted the fire, while she listened, and, as she nursed the flame, knew not that she tended the altar of a great self-renunciation. The man wasted no words, but silences fell between his sentences, and his speeches stood out raw and hideous, punctuated only by the crackling of the fire on the hearth.

"You know I've had a bit of bad luck at Stone Park?"

"Yes, indeed; 'twas in the paper. I'm very sorry about it."

"Good money gone and valuable beasts that money won't buy again. A devilish bit of work to burn poor unconscious creatures—eh?"

"So bad that I can't think anybody would have done it. 'Tis an unfortunate accident."

"I wish it had been. At least I won't say that, since it's a lie. I'm not sorry for what has fallen out, Ruth, because we always like to be proved right, and this proves me terribly right."

"I don't understand."

"You've got to understand. Hear the facts and then do what you please. This brings all to a climax. You've got to choose. I'm sorry for you in a way, and yet I'm not, for I do believe the Lord's behind it. Perhaps all happened because the Lord loves you—you, Ruth. Anyway, you're not the first woman whose hand has been forced by Providence."

She stared at these whirling words and uneasily remembered recent rumours that Northmore was not as steady as of old. She looked at him, but said nothing. He was pale and perspiring. His eyes shone brightly and his words jostled as they tumbled from him.

"The man who has done this infernal thing is Ives Pomeroy. Don't shake your head, don't laugh, for God's sake! It's no laughing matter."

"I do laugh," she said. "I laugh out loud, because I

know now that you have been fooled, or are fooling yourself. I would sooner believe that any man on Dartmoor had done it. I would sooner believe your own hand had done it. Never—never! Even you, who hate him, should know him far better than that."

"I would not believe it at first. I argued against it in my mind, even in face of facts, but it's true enough, Ruth."

"Never! not if an angel said so."

"It had to be proved to me; and it must be proved to you. Then I've got to ask a question. I'm only a human being: I can't face a thing like this and suck no good out of it. I must have something for my burnt hay and dead stock. He did it, and, by an accident, the still larger harm that he had planned was prevented."

"You're bewitched to think any such thing."

"Be just to others as well as generous to him. Remember his past and what he did long ago. His mother wasn't blind. His mother knew the meaning of proofs when she saw them."

"You'll never convince me of such an impossible thing, Matthew Northmore."

"So be it," he answered. "Then you must convince me that I'm wrong. If I can't prove he burnt my ricks and cattle, 'tis for you to show that he didn't. Listen to me first, and if I don't tell you the truth, explain to me what the truth is. You know the man has threatened loudly and wickedly here and there. Many have heard him. I rebuked him harshly enough when he came to me with your name on his tongue; and he never forgave me for it. To such natures the truth is á stinging plaster and makes them run mad. He threatened all the evil he could think of, you know that."

"Loud silly talk, yes. Vain as air, and light as air. He meant not a syllable of it."

"Didn't he? On the morning of the fire he rode past Stone Park going up to the peatworks at Amicombe Hill.

He knew that I was away and told Emanuel Codd that he knew it. Then he went off. 'Twas he that raised the alarm, remember, on the night of the fire."

"What more could he do?"

"He could light the flames before he set to work to put 'em out. And that's what he did do. Look now. These things I myself found under a second hayrick some way from the first. With my own eyes I found them. What should you judge that was?"

He took a pasteboard box from his pocket and opened it. Then he held up a wisp of grey, half-burned paper.

"'Tis a piece of paper that's been set on fire and then gone out."

"Exactly! That's what it is, a piece of writing-paper with writing on it. A letter, in fact."

"Yes."

"Look at it."

He handed the note to Ruth and she glanced down and saw her own words.

"You didn't think he'd use one of your letters to set fire to my hay, Ruth?"

She made no answer and he brought out a second paper.

"A bill," he said, "a bill—money due from Ives Pomeroy for guano. That I found along with the other—half burnt, too."

"What more?" she asked.

"D'you want more?"

"A scrap of paper isn't sufficient to condemn a man, surely. This may have happened in a thousand ways."

"It's proof positive, Ruth; and you are quite quick and clever enough to know it. But here's more yet."

He handed her a matchbox.

"Whose is that?"

"Pomeroy's. I gave it to him years ago. I know he uses it."

"Evidently he does."

Northmore said no more and waited a long time for Ruth to speak. The fire crackled; the girl's hand itched to add new fuel to the flame.

"Be just to me," said Matthew at last. "You are always just. You have reproved me sometimes for persecuting you. But be just to-day. There are only three people in the world who know this thing—you and me and Ives Pomeroy. None else need ever know it."

"Why do you come to me with this?" she asked fiercely; but she knew the reason.

"Because I must take my last chance on the flood tide. I come to you with this, because I want you—with my heart and soul and strength I want you. I shall die before long if I don't have you. You've got the fate of two men in your hand, and now you must act. You've hinted that I've bullied you sometimes; and so did Pomeroy say so. Never—never till now; but now—well, call it what you please. I'm not proud any more. I'm only starving and a bit mad, perhaps, as starving people will be. You must marry me, Ruth. This leaves you no loophole. I'll say nothing more but that I know in a very little time you'll bless the thing that has made you do it. I see the future cystal clear. Speak, then. If Pomeroy's to go to prison, say so. If he's to be free, say so. I'm cruel, I know that; but I'm cruel to be kind."

She stood and stared, and grew very white.

"I mean it," he continued. "Don't think I'm speaking rashly. I've fought with God A'mighty's own Self for a long night over this. I'm right, I'm doing the will of Heaven. I know, as well as I know anything, that the man's to have another chance and that you're going to give it to him. That's all that stands between him and penal servitude; there, under your hand, the letter you wrote him, the matchbox you gave him. Did Providence let me find this out, and not another, for nothing? Be my wife and let him go free to justify his days and fulfil

his mother's prayers. If not—but you'll not go back now. To be true to him is to be true to me, Ruth; to be false to him—— I know 'twill be your love for him will make you take me. But I'll suffer even that torture; because I'll look forward. You'll change when you get to find the husband I am, I'm sure of that."

"You've planned this, Matthew?"

"Fate planned it. God Almighty planned it. Don't decide afore the full meaning and force of the thing is made clear to your mind. Don't do anything in a hurry and repent later. I've waited long enough; God knows I can wait a bit more yet."

His voice was hard and no love rang in it. She knew that he was in reality despising himself, taking little joy in this necessary scene, and looking on feverishly to the time when it should be behind them both. But she also saw that he had not hurried to these vitiated conclusions; that he had slowly and steadily driven honour and justice out of his heart; that nothing she could now say or do would shake him from his purpose.

Ruth endeavoured to estimate the position, and first she occupied herself with Ives. She knew his enmity towards Northmore, and she was aware that of late he had gone heavily and darkly. She remembered in the past that nothing but the unexpected ever happened where Pomeroy was concerned; she recollected that when he seemed most strongly bent for right, his mother always feared for him. She judged the evidence and concluded with herself that Ives was guilty. Moved by some sudden and evil lust against Northmore, he had thus basely struck. And now, without doubt, his soul was heavy with shame, and he suffered the reward of his sins.

It took her long to decide, and she strove frantically to avoid decision; but she could not. Pomeroy had done terrible wrong, and it remained with her to determine who should suffer for his crime.

Northmore neither broke in upon her silence nor watched her working features. He guessed very accurately at the nature of her thoughts and let her fight out the battle alone. He was hopeful, but he did not show his hope. The proofs lay under her hands; the fire burnt behind her; but he made no effort to relieve her of the obvious temptation. He knew her well enough to feel no fear.

She rose at last and walked up and down for a time; but the letter and matchbox seemed to act as a magnet, to draw her eyes and excite her fingers. The minutes drifted on, and her decision was not made.

Then an elderly, grey woman came across from the shop.

"I must go out now, Miss Rendle. If you'll step behind the counter, please. It's after ten o'clock."

"Just coming, thank you," answered Ruth; and the woman went away.

Then the fascination of the proofs mastered her and she permitted them to exist no more. Before he could lift his hand, Ruth had taken the things and thrown them into the fire.

Still he trusted, because none had ever known her to act falsely.

"You understand what that means, Ruth?"

"Yes," she answered, "I understand. It means that I'll marry you, Matthew, and make you the best wife I can."

He uttered an inarticulate sound, almost like a cock crowing. Triumph pealed through it. He strode to her and caught her in his arms. He could scarcely speak, but seemed to be incoherently praying. She hardly heard him and was very thankful when he left her. He gave a lad who had been holding his horse half a crown; and the little boy, after recovering from his amazement, studied the pastrycook's window as one who has suddenly inherited wealth studies anew the face of the world and finds it changed. He went into the shop presently and purchased

a sugared cake of a sort until that day beyond his hopes. Ruth put up the pastry in a paper bag and gave the little boy change. His half-crown was still warm from the waistcoat pocket of the man she was going to marry.

Throughout that day at intervals, like a bell tolling, there came to her the knowledge of what she had done. Her mind was related to the incident as a mind is related to the shock of sudden death or misfortune. It beats in upon the brain, by fits and starts, as a new thing, at every waking hour. It flashes upon us in all its novel horror, not once, but a thousand times. Many days, many months must pass before the evil becomes accepted and received, as a permanent part of our load; for memory rolls in a tide of successive waves, and impressions are built up slowly, not stamped at a blow. Were it otherwise, the world could not contain its full weight of grief and keep sane.

CHAPTER XL

SACRED GROUND

WHILE Ruth endured strong emotions, in which the significance of her conduct began slowly to stamp itself into her mind and paint the future, Pomeroy also went through something of a crisis, and his brooding darkness again lifted and gave place to a phase of calm hope and decision.

Moved by unrest on the day that Northmore rode to Tavistock, angered at the farmer's cold attitude, at Codd's conduct and at the world in general, Ives took himself and his thoughts from work, and wandered before a great west wind that drove him upward into the desolation. He was unsettled every way, and now, surveying the theatre of his life from King Tor, he despised it and despised himself for stopping in it. With his eyes watering from the force of the gale, he looked down over a world of dead heather and grey stones hugely scattered from the heights to the vales below; and he looked up at a sky blown quite clear save for cumulus on the horizon. It had rained until noon; then the sudden awakening of a great sea wind swept the mist flying before it, and created a luminous purity of air.

The man looked down and perceived the whole of his little world spread beneath him. For a time its diminutive size impressed him forcibly and almost drove him to shame. He told himself that he had never realized its circumscriptions until that hour.

All lay between the crockets of Sampford Spiney church, rising above their proper garland of tree tops to the south, and Great Mis, where it ascended northerly. Within these boundaries, under the jagged horizons of the Moor, his thirty years of life had passed; and the scene had not been

too small to ripen him into a man; and the life had not been too tame to leave his forehead unwrinkled or his mind unstored with good and evil. Every peak and dingle, every acre of reclaimed earth, every forest that flamed and scattered its last foliage on the fierce wind, was known to him. The fields were his familiars; each possessed its own characteristics, its virtues and defects. All the important incidents of his life were embraced by this abode of natural forces; here his days had moved through the pageant of the seasons and the passage of the years. His life had been and still was part of the life of the hamlet. Only one great experience belonged to another place; but Tavistock also spread within his sight. He knew where a prison stood, and gazed now at the little country town, grey, glittering, rain-washed in its green valley far away.

Pomeroy felt a sort of humiliation to remember that he had never passed from these pitiful precincts into the bourn of the world beyond; that the actions and activities of thirty years had revolved about yonder grey smudge under Vixen Tor, the place of his birth. Merivale and Stone Park; the river and the Moor; the cots, the homesteads and the public house—these things had made his life. Why, the vagrant, who crawled down one hill, drank and departed up the other, showed more courage and enterprise than he; the very ponies ranged freer and further. A great sense of the revolting smallness of existence sickened him, and he lifted a frown to the dim wonder of the world beyond. Was he to move forever within a ring-fence of furze and granite? Was he to pull at his chain like a tethered sheep?

Then, suddenly, even upon this moment of darkest impatience, like the sun through a cloud, there wakened light and sweetness, and a harmony of new thoughts. The poetry of the things that were past touched him, for of late days the loveliness of his mother's life had dimly

gleamed for him, and he dwelt upon it after a fashion that was not possible until time had rolled between his heart and the agony of her death.

He looked down now, and the valley was all changed. There woke in him a proud, defiant joy to be here and nowhere else; because he was regarding the quiet places of his mother's life; her home and the hamlet wherein she had dwelt; the little heath-tracks and footpaths that her feet had trodden; the cottage doors where her presence had entered. These low, grey roofs were blessed forever because her head had been under them; this was the valley that must shine for him brighter than any star of dawn or evening, because she lived and laboured in it—lived and laboured for him—and loved him ceaselessly, from the first hour of his life until the last hour of her own. Here had passed her gracious days within a narrower radius far than his; here she had suffered and here she had shone, like a beacon-fire, to lead sad spirits towards wisdom, to warm cold hearts with her ready love.

This grey valley and the crying wind that scoured it; the river's thread; the mournful, naked roads, so straight and stern; the habitations and the passionless amphitheatre of stone that contained all, was translated then for this man and grew precious above any kingdom of earth or heaven. The home that had held his mother would never be mean to him. Only the great west wind could sing her song, only this stern lodgment of granite, and wild sky and silence was worthy to make a trysting-place for her high heart. The things that he saw were not small any longer. These homes of thunder and haunts of the winter snowdrift; these everlasting hills and the waters that ran among them had grown sanctified by her sojourn. Themselves nothing, to the son they were exalted by his mother's goodness and contentment, her loving-kindness and wide patience with all created things.

He gazed upon sacred ground and this little cup of

earth brimmed for his young soul and grew lovely. Her presence still haunted all, spanned the valley and the hills, as with a rainbow, and linked them to the watcher. Here was the gate of heaven, where his mother's feet had rested a little before she passed onward. He began to think upon her, and there followed the customary advantage to himself. From her memory he passed to the things that were good to her, and her wishes, and her hopes. Far off he saw a horseman riding down into Merivale, but at that distance he could not recognize him. Only when this rider left the road and proceeded towards Stone Park, did he know that it was Northmore. It darkened his mind to reflect upon Matthew, but he dismissed him, thought of Ruth and considered the difference that her departure had made to him. The loss was lessened because he saw her at Tavistock nearly every week, and often on Sundays she visited Merivale. He had driven her backwards and forwards thrice, and won pleasure from so doing.

Ives decided that he would ask Ruth to marry him that night. He rejoiced in her suddenly. Her portrait fired him; her body gladdened him. It seemed that much of her natural beauty and charm had evaded him as a younger man. He remembered how his mother chid him, when he had told her in the past that he could see nothing to admire about Ruth. Then he assured himself that it was not his own mind and taste had changed, but Ruth. Five years had made great differences in her.

He leapt down off King Tor, and went home and prepared to go into Tavistock at nightfall. Then he changed his mind and postponed the event until a subsequent day, when the shops closed early.

Morning found him furious to see Ruth. He woke longing, above all other deeds, to kiss her. He could not wait until the early closing day came. He could not wait at all. He made a swift breakfast and set off to Tavistock before nine o'clock.

As he passed the cottage of old Mrs. Bolt, Jill appeared at the door. She had seen him approach and now ventured to speak.

"If you are going into Tavistock, I wish you'd bring back a box of them throat lozenges for the old woman. Chemist sells 'em. They be called somebody's bronchial tablets, and they rest her breathing parts a lot."

"I'll get 'em," said Ives.

"She's not up to much of late days. I'm spending a day or two along with her. Dwaling[1] a bit in her talk she is, and often names your mother."

"Then I'll see her," he said. "I'll give her 'good-morning.'"

"And welcome. She'll be glad to speak to you, no doubt."

Jill wondered not a little why Pomeroy found himself still at liberty. Mr. Codd had told her of the entire success of the plot. He explained how Northmore had found the matchbox and the papers; how he had sent instantly for Inspector Bachelor, and doubtless acquainted him with the facts. But Ives continued to go free and not so much as a rumour as yet associated him with the outrage at Stone Park.

Old Rachel proved in a lachrymose mood and asserted a strong desire and willingness to die at once.

"They'm all there—everyone that I care about the leastest bit," she said somewhat ungraciously. "I want to go to 'em and I hope it won't be long afore I do. I've no nature in me now of a morning, when I wake up—not a spark—have I, Jill? 'Tis no joy to me to see the morning light. I'll go in my sleep, I hope, and then my eyes will open on a better dawn than ever us seed on Dartymoor. Have 'e any messages? Because now's the time for 'em while my wits be clear."

Pomeroy considered At such a moment no feeling of

[1] Dwaling: Wandering in speech.

scepticism clouded his mind. He was indeed over bold and over sanguine.

"Tell my mother I'm tokened to Ruth Rendle," he said, and Rachel became mildly excited.

"At last! Her dream for years it was. Really going to be!"

She held out her hand to him; then she rose slowly, and put up her old face to his and kissed him.

"Give you joy of it—and her. No need for me to promise to take that. Such a great thing will never be kept from Avisa—not for an hour. 'Twill make her heaven brighter, and 'twill be the pleasure of some good angel to carry the news to her. Mind you let me see Ruth the next time she's up here."

Ives thanked his mother's ancient friend and then left her. Jill had said nothing before his intelligence; but he could not leave her so. His look pleaded with her more than his words.

"Wish me joy, too—can't you?" he said.

She remembered much—debts, delights, insults, grievances. At another time and under different circumstances she would have cursed him; but her own lines promised to flow into easy places at last and her heart was softened. She looked on ahead. What might not happen?

"For the sake of the past I wish you every blessing that the world can bring you, Ives."

"Thank you for that. And you? There's a whisper going. . . . I hope you'll take him. 'Twill mean large comfort, and you'll be the richest woman we've ever had in Merivale."

"I know," she said. "Well, why not, since you——?"

"There's no reason against it. Let me be the first to congratulate you. Nobody knows better'n me the splendid woman you are."

He went away and left her still wondering. She had it in her mind to take his side now and fight for him with

Northmore. He certainly must not go to prison. She pondered many things and saw no reason to despair of the future.

And Pomeroy walked to Tavistock in an hour and arrived hot and excited. But his speed did not prevent him from reflection as he sank down the last long hill; and reflection made him somewhat uneasy. He had actually spoken of himself as engaged, while yet it remained to be seen whether Ruth would accept him! He blamed himself very heartily for this insolence. Who was he to look upon success as a matter of course? He was savage with himself, and from that height of easy confidence which had asserted his engagement, he fell into a mental condition of abasement and doubt. She might have long ceased to think of him except as a brother; she might know him far too thoroughly to run any risk of a closer relationship.

He found Ruth ill.

She was in the shop when he entered and could not leave it. Therefore, he offered her marriage over the counter.

He was first concerned for her pallor, and she explained it by a sleepless night. Then he spoke of trifling things, yet struck one small matter very near her heart.

"What'll you say? I've lost your matchbox, Ruth. 'Twas my greatest treasure, and now 'tis gone and I shan't be happy till you've given me another. I must have left it up at Amicombe Hill."

She stared at him and he caught her doing so.

"Forgive me," he said, "and get me another. But ban't about that I've come. D'you know, Ruth, I seemed awful near my mother yesterday. I was up over on King Tor looking down, and I could have sworn my mother was at my elbow, somehow. Never knowed such a feeling come over me since she was taken. And you was woven into it, if you can understand. From that moment I've

felt a craving to see you and—and—— And then this morning, after I'd somehow looked upon it as done, I asked myself how I could dare to have the cheek to hope for it. But you know that cheek was always my strong point. With other girls that is, not with you. I never felt to you the same as to them—not so easy and friendly. It came awful slow and sure, Ruth, and that's my excuse for never having offered myself before, though I've been on the edge of it terrible often. But 'twas a growing thing—growed while I never knew it growed—growed and growed while my dear was dying—growed on and on after till somehow——"

He stopped a moment and she stood with her head bent. She did not speak. She was struggling to retain consciousness.

"Looking back, Ruth, 'tis amazing to me I could have lived in the same house with you and not been mad for you waking and sleeping. God knows I felt everything about you was sweet and comely and lovely and too good for me. But mother wanted for us to marry, and such a cranky dog I was that just because I knew that—and yet not quite that neither. I was in love with you afore even them days. I falled in love with you first for your laugh. 'Tis a very soft, dear little laugh—like a mother moor-hen calling to her chicks. And—then—but how can a crack-brained man like me go over all them years? I only know how I've stood of late, and how I stand now. Maybe it's too late to dare to offer myself, Ruth; but God judge me if I'm not in earnest; and I'll be the best husband I know how to be. Not much of a man for such a maid as you—but——"

He bent across and took her hand. She looked at him and tried to speak but could not. A moment later she sank away from him and fell in a heap.

He shouted aloud, and, finding no other way, climbed over the counter to the detriment of the cakes displayed

upon it. Ruth had fainted. She recovered quickly, however, and Ives, in some dismay, went off to the nearest public house and quickly returned with brandy.

She drank it and thanked him.

"'Twas the shock," she explained to the shopkeeper. "He told me something I didn't expect, Mrs. Foster. But I'm all right again now. Come back presently, Ives."

Pomeroy went off and did not return for an hour. To him it was the longest hour that he had ever spent, and during its progress he suffered considerably. Something had gone amiss—that much he clearly saw. For the rest he was in the dark.

She waited for him when he returned, and together they went out beside the river and walked under great trees there.

"Forgive me for making such a show of myself, Ives, but 'twas the sudden shock coming just now. I'm very fond of you, Ives, and always shall be, and I'm proud to think you'd care to marry me; but 'tis too late for that. I'm going to marry Matthew Northmore. I've promised him, Ives."

"Northmore! Good God A'mighty, you can't! What! after all these years? Don't you hate the man? Right well you know it!"

"No, I don't. I can't hate such love as he's got for me. It's better than I deserve, whatever shape it takes. He's been faithful, Ives; and he's strong; and he's won. Such as I am, he's won me, and marry him I will."

Pomeroy would not hear of this. He protested, stormed, and swore. He demanded reasons from Ruth, but she would say nothing definite.

"I respect him and admire him, and he's too strong for me," she repeated. "'Tis vain, dear Ives, speaking against the man like this and saying evil things against him. He's no enemy to you. Believe that."

"You're not honest in this business," he answered. "And

you've fooled me now, as you fooled him before. Would he dare to offer himself again, after all he knows, if you hadn't invited him to do it? You've played with him and broke his heart and driven him to drink, and now, when the man's sunk miles from his former manhood, you take him. You've done deadly wrong; and well you know it. But you can't—you shan't marry Northmore—not while I've got a shotgun. If I ban't worth a thought—well, I say nothing against that. I'm a useless, worthless pattern of man—not good enough for a woman like you. But you shan't marry him—that I will swear. I'll save you from that if I swing for it. You won't be honest with me, Ruth, though I've always been honest with you. Then I'll leave you and see what he can tell me. D'you think I'm a born fool? D'you think I don't see very clear that there's a lot more behind this than my mind can fathom? I'll go to him then, and I'll strangle the truth out of him if there's no other way to get at it."

"Don't do that, Ives. Nothing can be gained by more wickedness. He and I understand each other perfectly well. I'm doing what I believe to be right. Have pity upon a woman, and don't——"

"To hell with the whole pack of you!" he roared out. "'Twas thus with t'other, and now 'tis thus with you. I'll die at peace without a wife. I'll finish with all of you, for not one has ever been anything to me but an unrestful plague. Never again—never—so help me God—will I touch a woman. And answer me that man shall; and the more you pray for him, the more I'll drag it out of him! He's won you with some damned lie. He's no fair fighter—no drunkard ever is. I'll not trouble you any more; but I'll get to the bottom of this before I've done with it; and you shan't marry him while I'm alive. I'd rather cut your throat with my own hand than suffer it."

He left her, ghastly white—standing and shivering under the trees. Then he set off homeward. But the accident of passing a railway station changed all his purpose in a

flash. This catastrophe upset his equilibrium and, by some inward cataclysm, heaved up another common hunger of his nature to the top. He longed for women in the same moment that he cursed them. His spirit had gone sour under this storm, and he was full of passion turned to poison. He took train at Tavistock, went down to Plymouth, spent two days there, and gave a loose rein to sense. Then he returned home exhausted in body, but fortified in mind. His brains were clear again, and he perceived that some great unknown event must have brought about Ruth's action. What had Northmore done to change her? Nothing that he could conceive was too bad for the master of Stone Park now. He planned a thousand crushing counterstrokes; and then some dawn of reason began to touch the chaos of his mind. His long rages weakened; the futility of this great relapse impressed itself upon his soul. He decided to hear Northmore. These reflections came with his return home on the third night after Ruth had refused him. He woke refreshed in body, but his mind now suffered a retrogression. He doubted why Northmore should be allowed to speak. He longed to be at the man's throat; he felt that Matthew must yet battle for this woman before he won her.

And elsewhere Ruth considered the story from its beginnings, saw herself gradually waking to the purpose of Ives, watched herself waiting for him to speak the longed-for word, and then perceived how upon this dream, even at the moment of fulfilment, had come the horror of the fall of Pomeroy and the attitude of his wronged rival. For her the matter was ended, and she could not take back her word. She accepted the sacrifice for the precious fruits of it; and she trusted that with passage of time, Ives would return to himself, repent his wickedness, and find all that his mother had hoped and desired for him in another heart than hers. Through long nights she suffered, and her agony heaped years upon her head, lessened her beauty, and stamped care in her eyes forever.

CHAPTER XLI

ENGAGEMENTS

Two days after the return of Ives certain familiar persons met at the bar of *The Jolly Huntsmen* and Peter Toop announced his approaching marriage.

Moleskin and Rupert Johnson were of the party; Emanuel Codd sat in a corner; other local men crowded the bar and both Peter and Joel stood behind the counter.

The last barmaid proved another failure: she suffered from religious mania and had to be dismissed, because her convictions, uttered at inconvenient seasons, threw an atmosphere of depression upon the hilarity of the public house.

Mr. Peter cast glances towards the door and then, evidently labouring under some nervousness, spoke, as Matthew Northmore entered.

"Was waiting for you, farmer, afore I broke a bit of news. Even Joel don't know it yet. I've kept it for my friends to-night."

"'Twill mean free drinks, I hope," said Moleskin.

"In a word, souls, I be going to follow a good example. Here's Matthew here tokened at last, after most faithful conduct, I'm sure; and Moleskin's daughter have taken this here man Johnson; and there's marryings in the air to right and left beside; so why not I? 'Tis the question I've axed myself of late. And Nature was for it and the woman was willing; and so 'tis done: I'm taking her in the early spring."

"Bet you a dollar that I know her name, Peter," said Mr. Cawker.

"Very like. I ban't the sort to hide my doings under

a bushel, Cawker. To be plain, 'tis Mrs. Jill Bolt, widow of the late Samuel."

"A fine, red, recommendable sort of girl," said Moleskin. "She haven't had much luck so far, but she's drawn a prize at last, and no mistake! She've got a temper, however, if colour counts. Your hair is taken from the evil to come, Peter; but you'll have to look sharp after your beard. Shake hands and good luck and long life to you both!"

The company expressed great gratification and all took Mr. Toop's hand in turn. Some were coarse, but all were kind.

"And you, Joel?" asked his brother. "What do you say? You stand there rinsing glasses like a machine—haven't you got a word?"

Joel was clearly ill-pleased with this news.

"I hope 'twill prove better than it looks: that's all I've got to say," he answered,

Peter flushed; his jaw dropped and he stroked his beard.

"I didn't expect that," he said.

"Your only chance was to choose a female getting well up for elderly. What good be a fiery young woman like that to you? She've only taken you for your money!"

"He's jealous! He's jealous," cried Codd. "Look at his eyes—I lay he wanted her hisself!"

"Not I. When I marry, 'twill be something that belongs to my own generation, not a giglet wench to bring my grey hairs to the grave. And this I'll say: I warn you, Peter, that I go out of this house the day that woman comes in."

Peter panted and his eyes flashed a grand indignation from behind their glasses.

"Think better of that," he said. "Don't wait for her: go to-morrow—go to-night if you like. For a brother to say these things! 'Tis not to be borne!"

The old men glared into each other's faces; then Joel left the bar.

Peter wiped his forehead and shook his head.

"Too bad, too bad," he murmured. "Why for shouldn't I do the manly thing and wed like any other? If he'd found somebody to take him in his rheumatism, I'd have been the first to stand up and say 'well done!' But 'tis always the same with that man, though my brother. A very cross-grained and curmudgeonly disposition when other folks' good fortune be the matter. He mourns another man's good luck as if 'twas his own bad. And what have I done, or the woman either, to make him get niffed like this?"

"A jealousy for certain," declared Northmore. "Perhaps he'd thought of her, too, in his cautious way, and was actually going to ask her. But, meantime, you'd dashed in and won."

"Well, there it is," said Peter, as he took snuff freely. "I won't pretend I don't feel Joel's harsh view of the case. It makes me a thought down about the whole thing, especially coming to-night, when I'd planned to let it out in a pleasant way and make a bit of gossip for you all. Still, the rest of you seem pretty pleased about it, and I'm sure the woman is—if words count for anything. She's seen the rough edge of life and will know how to value the smooth in consequence. Well, what's it to be?"

"Bottles of wine!" cried Moleskin. "'Tis the very night for it. Two bottles of your thick, black port, and six pennyworth of old brandy poured in to lift it up! That's the tipple to drink to you and your lady. She's a grand woman, Peter; and I hope you'll do your duty as becomes a valiant bachelor."

They drank and grew excited. The talk ranged to Northmore, and he, too, was toasted. His forthcoming marriage had set many tongues wagging and the temporary disappearance of Pomeroy was associated with it.

Now Peter spoke of the matter.

"For my part, when I heard of your great deed and that our Ruth had come round, my first thought was pleasure that you and me should become, as it were, relations by marriage. And I feel so still, I'm sure. You'll make as good a husband as I shall, Matthew. But next I turned my mind on young Pomeroy, because his mother, afore she went home, was very much set on them two being man and wife. However, he held off and you held on, and now you're rewarded for your pluck, as you deserve to be. Have you seen him since the news was out?"

"I haven't."

"There may be more reasons than one for his going off," declared Emanuel. "For my part, 'twouldn't surprise me if he didn't come back afore he's fetched."

The old man caught his master's grim stare and was silent. Of late Codd, much angered to find that nothing was done against Pomeroy, had tried to force Northmore's hand, so far as he dared. The position confused him, and he could not understand it. He was slow-minded, and did not associate Northmore's betrothal with his silence concerning Pomeroy.

"Be off, Codd," said Matthew pointedly. "I'll speak to you presently. The name of Pomeroy's been in your mouth rather too much of late, and I should like to know why. Get on the way home and I'll follow you in five minutes."

Codd rose, both frightened and angry. His plot seemed likely to miscarry and his own position was difficult. Emanuel could not make Northmore proceed against Ives without defeating his own object; because he was supposed to know nothing about the papers and the matchbox. He determined to see Jill as soon as possible and learn whether her cunning could find a way.

Now he departed and Moleskin criticised him unfavourably.

"I wish you'd never took on that old dog," he said to Northmore. "He ban't a nice party, and there's not a man in Merivale—let alone the women—that hasn't had to suffer evil from his tongue. I'll say nought about myself. I've been misunderstood from my youth up by better folk than Codd, and now I'm used to it and go my simple way and don't invite anybody to give an opinion on me; but for you strait-laced, common men, as never be outside law and order by a hair, and never so much as look over a gate to envy your neighbour a blade of grass—why, 'tis a monstrous thing that crooked-tongued varmint should always be spitting out his nasty thoughts and suspicions against you. I wonder you haven't risen in a rally and taken him down to the river and tried to wash his beastly old mind a thought cleaner afore now."

"A ducking at his age might kill him, however," argued Johnson.

"We must all die, worse luck," replied Moleskin. "And he's far better away, if it could be done in such a general fashion that no one man should feel the thing too much on his mind."

Northmore lived a dual life at this time. An inner existence of pain and feverish unrest was contrasted with a visible state of reckless happiness. He could say no unkind word; he cared not even to think a harsh thought of any man. Therefore, he argued for Codd.

"Live and let live," he said. "You're the last that should throw a stone, neighbour."

"So I am," confessed Moleskin instantly, "so I am. But I hate a small heart."

"All's well with you, and your daughter going to marry this fine chap, Rupert here."

"Yes, yes; we be prospering something wonderful and I've not heard that anybody's much vexed over it."

"What about last October?" asked a labourer.

"Ah, Jack," answered Moleskin. "The same old story

—birds missing and noises in the night down in the woods round about. Those things ban't rightly understood, and never will be till they have a different sort of chap from head-keeper Gregory."

"If you mean my uncle——" began Jack.

"Yes, my dear, your uncle I do mean. Your uncle is a very good man—when he's got a better to watch him. But he's not a great thinker, Jack. You always know what he'll do next. A very proper, steadfast quality for every-day people; but not for a gamekeeper. Such a man is like a soldier and ought to deal in surprises. 'Tis the dealer in surprises, Jack, as finds the best market. And that reminds me; I've got a little matter to attend to myself, this evening."

Moleskin emptied his glass and departed, leaving behind him a fine ethical problem for the company to solve.

"Why should that chap's wife and daughter come near to starving so long as he was straight, and find themselves easy and comfortable again now he'm at his old games?" asked Peter. "The moment he lapsed from righteousness, things began to brighten up for his women. There's something wrong in that surely."

But none could provide a reason for this anomaly. They were still arguing when Ives Pomeroy suddenly appeared.

Peter began to chide him amiably, but he stopped, for the newcomer was not in a mood for pleasantries. He accosted Northmore harshly before the people.

"I've just been over to your house and they said you was out. So I thought I might meet you here."

Northmore was no actor and he found it difficult to face the other without emotion, for this sudden meeting surprised him. He had heard from Ruth how Ives went to see her, but she gave no details of their meeting and was indeed insistent on one subject alone. "He'll want to get the rights of this out of you," she told Matthew; "but he mustn't. Never, never let him hear that I know

what he did." And Northmore had promised it. He had gone further and undertaken that Pomeroy should hear nothing of his discovery; but here he reckoned on very faulty knowledge of his own; and now, as the other stood before him, haggard, stern and ferocious, Matthew began to perceive the real difficulties ahead. He firmly believed that Pomeroy was guilty, and this conviction now buoyed him up. That this man, under any pretext, could have the effrontry to beard him thus, after his crimes of the recent past, stung Northmore to the necessary pitch of anger; and upon his wroth followed the inevitable explosion from Pomeroy.

"My business is with you, but anybody may hear it," continued Ives. "Ruth Rendle tells me that you and she are going to be married."

"Yes; she's consented at last. I hear you saw her a day or two ago. You weren't in a hurry to wish me joy."

"Did she tell you why I went to see her and what happened?"

"I wasn't interested."

"But you would have been. I went to ask her to marry me, Matthew Northmore."

Northmore only stared and made no answer.

'A day behind the fair, Ives—not like you," said Mr. Toop cautiously.

"And she told me that she was going to marry you."

"Of course. What then?"

"Then she fainted," said Ives shortly. "That's what happened then."

"Your bluster and noise, I suppose."

"Don't face me like this!" thundered the other. "I'm not here to hear your drivel. I want the stark truth out of you, and I'll have it! You've got to tell me this: why has she changed her mind?"

"How d'you know she has changed?"

"Know it? Hasn't your name made her grow thin?

Hasn't your plaguing worn her out? Didn't she leave here to try and get away from you? And now to take you! What's the reason? That's what I will know."

"You've no right or sense in all this," answered Northmore. "You're mad to behave so, or ask such a question."

"Am I mad? Then why did she faint? Tell me that. I'm not going to be fobbed off with less than truth. That girl could do nought crooked or false, and not a word could I get out of her. But you're different. I want to know what she's took you for, after hating the sight of you for five years. And that's what you've got to tell me."

"Have I?"

"Since when have you won the right to order the world to tell you its secrets?" asked an enemy of Ives.

"If there is a secret, 'tis a vile one, as any man can see," answered Pomeroy, turning on him. "This man has forced her to cave in and say she'll marry him. He's tormented her into it. And how was it done? 'Tisn't because she won't take me that I want to know, for I'm not good enough for her and never was. But I understand her ten thousand times better than him, and I know she'd never have took him unless 'twas for some terrible purpose."

None spoke and Ives turned on Matthew.

"You've made her do this against her nature," he said; "you've driven her into it out of your own hunger to have her; you've——"

But Northmore silenced him by a louder sound and raised a din by beating at the side of the counter with his stick. He was pale and furious. His self-control had departed.

"Be silent, you hypocrite! You—you of all men—to dare to speak to me like this."

"Of all men I should be the one."

"You're a fool for your pains, then."

"Perhaps I may be; but I'll have something more

still for my pains, if I've got to tear it out of you with my naked hands. Answer you shall!"

Northmore grew calmer again and calculated the results if Pomeroy heard the truth.

A great silence had fallen upon the company during this duel, and now Peter took it upon him to end the scene.

"I must ask you two to stop, please," he said. "No politics, and no quarrels between man and man, and no drunkenness, has always been the rule here. If you've come to drink, Pomeroy, do so; but I can't have any more words."

"Leave it," advised an old man. "This row ban't none of our business and we don't want to hear no more. You two can have the matter out between yourselves. A thousand pities you'm not ten year younger, Matthew. If you was, the pair of you could have it out in the good old way, with your mauleys, and give us a bit of sport."

Then Northmore spoke.

"We'll finish this alone. I'm engaged to-morrow, but the next day when you will. We can meet on the Moor. This shan't be left as it stands. It can't be."

Pomeroy went over to him and spoke privately.

"The Lone Stones, then—the evening after to-morrow."

"As you please."

"And the truth, or God's my judge, I'll let daylight into you!"

"You'll find truth bitter, as men of your stamp must."

For the moment, regardless of consequences or his promise to Ruth, Northmore had determined to tell Pomeroy what he knew against him. He was in no mood to argue with himself or to ask himself what would be the other's attitude on learning that his crime was no secret. But the Lone Stones had struck coldly on Matthew's ear and silenced him more effectively than mention of any other spot on earth. He associated the circle with Ruth's first

refusal to marry him. He even suspected that Ives might be familiar with that vanished event and had chosen the place on purpose to remind him of it.

But Pomeroy, when he named the Lone Stones, thought only of their remoteness from all human life and human interference. It was a good place to knock a man on the head; or to be knocked on the head if fortune fell contrary. Passion had him tight, and raged high at this season. He departed with a spirit darker than the moonless night and swore to himself that Matthew Northmore should never marry Ruth.

CHAPTER XLII

THE REVELATION

EMANUEL CODD persisted in his resolution to see Jill, and walked to Sampford Spiney on the following day that he might do so. His master had gone to see a lawyer at Tavistock, and the coast was clear. Jill's marriage would take place after Christmas, and she had little leisure to devote to lesser matters; but Codd interested her. They walked out in a lane between the village and the Vixen, while he told of what had happened and she swiftly explained the things that Emanuel had not fathomed.

"In a proper fury of rage he was," said the man. "So I hear to-day. He came in the bar, after I'd left it, and every man thought he was going to fly at Northmore's throat. Yet Northmore holds off and don't do a stroke against him. This business of getting Ruth Rendle have made my master soft, seemingly. Why don't he put Pomeroy in prison?"

Jill laughed. She was that sort of spirit who treats the world reciprocally. Her coming good fortune had softened her heart in various directions.

"Can't you see what's happened? I can. Northmore thinks that Pomeroy burnt his property, and that puts Pomeroy in his power. So off he goes to Ruth Rendle instead of a policeman."

"Why for should he?"

"Because she's all the world to him, and Ives Pomeroy is all the world to her. They were tokened. He told me so himself. 'Twas a choice between trouble for Pomeroy and trouble for Ruth. Any man in Northmore's fix would have done the same. He's got her on the strength

of that fire. So you hit Pomeroy harder even than you hoped. And helped your master, too. You ought to be very well satisfied."

"I don't see I've hurt Pomeroy, however."

"Why—good Lord—you've robbed him clean of the girl he was going to marry! 'Tis the terriblest thing that could have fallen upon him."

"A girl! What's one girl more than other to him? He'll rage a bit and then find a dozen more. I want to know that he's picking oakum and got the broad arrow on his back."

Jill, from her standpoint of coming prosperity, looked at Mr. Codd and disliked him. A revulsion of circumstance had brought with it large modifications of mind. She was, of course, illogical and flagrantly unfair. Emanuel's attitude, perfectly reasonable a week ago, now appeared disgraceful in her eyes. Light and hope had leavened the adamant of her heart in one direction; and now they made it hard where before it had been soft. Her sympathy with Emanuel's grievances vanished and in its place was wakened a shadowy tenderness towards old enemies. Her mind played delicately with vanished years, while her mood ignored the intermediate period and concerned itself with the past. She remembered her maiden days and love-making with young Ives; she dreamed of that springtime gone by, when he carried her across the river and kissed her halfway over. All animosity had died under a sensuous comfort of spirit begotten by good fortune. She often imagined herself in the bar of *The Jolly Huntsmen* alone with Ives—talking to him across the counter and giving of the best that her husband's bottles held.

In this spirit Mr. Codd found Jill of little consolation. First he was angered at her attitude and sneered at the change in her views; then she repaid his offensive tones with interest, and he became alarmed.

"I hate your poisonous mind," she said. "Not done enough? You've done a deal too much and—well, 'tis a pity you bring it all home so clear to me just now, because I'm not on your side no more, and I'm sorry I ever listened to your wicked ideas, and for two pins I'd put this right. You'd better go. I don't want to be seen talking to you. You've done too much mischief as it is, and I wish you'd leave Merivale or die. You're no good to anybody."

"You talk as if you was straight yourself!" he burst out. "Better you look back a bit before you preach to me. Who was it put me up to——?"

"The devil," said Jill, "and well you know it. Don't you dare to say I had any hand in this, because if you do, I'll go straight and make Peter Toop have you up to Tavistock for telling lies about me. I took mighty good care to keep out of it all, and I don't know anything whatever about it—not a shadow. And if you liked to come to me with your wicked plans, that was your lookout. You can't hurt a fingernail of mine—I took very good care of that. And the less we see or hear of one another in future, the better—for you."

She left him irresolute and alarmed. He forgot Pomeroy and began to be seriously concerned for himself. He was ignorant and took her threats very much in earnest. He asked himself what he might do, but he could not estimate her power. The uncertainty of her attitude made him frightened for his future and threw him into a furious rage with her. He went home baffled and in a mood of fear and desperation. He felt that in Jill an enemy had risen from his own camp; and he wondered how to be even with her but could not guess.

Meantime, Jill Bolt also reflected long and deeply upon the situation. All was very clear to her. Again and again she broke the thread of thought to wander through vanished days with Pomeroy. The pictures ended in sighs.

That aspect of human relations had failed her. Fate had decided that she should never enjoy a man worth having; but, instead, a rich husband was to be her lot. Peter would probably wear better; but "God send he don't wear too long," thought Jill.

She awoke into a very real regret for Pomeroy. She herself could not wed him; but she found herself very large-minded before the spectacle of his disappointment. Jill was much pleased with herself upon feeling these generous emotions, because she doubted not that they argued a good heart and a kindly disposition. For Northmore she cared not a straw, but she felt that he was marrying Ruth under false pretences and that the plot to punish Ives had gravely miscarried. She was exceedingly glad now to feel that it had done so. She told herself that she had come to her senses and that, in any event, she would never have allowed Ives Pomeroy to go to prison. She even asked herself why he should lose Ruth. A sensation of discovery got hold upon her. She was again surprised and gratified to find how much virtue inhabited her heart. Then she began to calculate how far she really stood involved in the rascality of Codd. That analysis was not pleasant, therefore she shirked it, and turned to the practical side. What power had Codd to do her harm? She decided that he had none. She began to think loosely again, and ran on, and pictured herself posing to Ives as his salvation. She conceived a drama of the most dramatic character, in which she must appear as the saviour of Pomeroy and the real heroine of the situation. She pictured Pomeroy thanking her for giving Ruth back to him. These dreams were very agreeable, but between them and the present moment lay hard realities.

Jill determined to see Matthew Northmore before that day was done; and after nightfall she walked through Merivale and across the Moor to Stone Park.

A woman let her in, and Northmore received her with

the air of somewhat boisterous heartiness that he now affected. He was pressing preparations for his marriage and had arranged for its celebration in a month's time.

"Well, Mrs. Bolt; but I must call you 'Jill' in future, for we shall be relations in a sort of way before long!"

He sat at a table littered with accounts and papers. He was preparing to transfer most of his possessions into the name of his future wife. A small oil lamp burnt on the table, and the fire had sunk low. Now he mended it and told Jill to take off her jacket.

At the door a man was listening, in the classic manner, at the keyhole. Northmore's new serving woman had told Emanuel who was the visitor and thrown him into a very violent excitement. What did Jill want with his master so quickly after their conversation of the morning? He felt that his own position was involved, perhaps even his own freedom. Therefore he listened until he had heard enough to assure him of his worst fears.

"Come to the fire," said Matthew. "Lucky I hadn't gone down to *The Jolly Huntsmen*, for a yarn and a glass to-night. The lawyers have regularly muddled my brains I assure you."

Jill looked at him, as he stretched his legs to the fire and yawned. She marked the exaggerated manner so foreign to him. He seemed as one who pretended that all was well with his world, yet knew the opposite.

"Sorry I haven't come about anything pleasant," said the visitor—"quite the contrary, in fact."

At a distance the thought of Northmore's sufferings had not troubled Jill; but now, in the moment when she was about to inflict them, she felt all that this must mean to him. She plunged into the matter swiftly.

"I've done a terrible wrong, and you've got to know it."

"Why, Jill? Why should I? Don't bother me with your sins, there's a good girl. I've got plenty of my own to bother about, I assure you. But this isn't the moment.

We're both going to be married. Let's try and grasp at a bit of happiness, if we can."

"I know how you feel. I'm like that, too. I'm frightened at the chance of losing it all. I wake in a cold sweat of a night sometimes from dreaming that Peter's changed his mind about me."

"No fear of that. He's in luck."

There was a moment of silence; then Jill spoke out.

"You hate Ives Pomeroy, don't you?"

"No," he said. "I can call God to witness now that I don't. I'm very sorry for him in more ways than anybody knows, or ever will. He's got a terrible deal on his conscience, poor chap, and 'tis small wonder that he's wild and savage and furious. But only one thing matters now, and that is that Ruth Rendle is going to marry me instead of him. You see, she's decided at last."

"Don't deceive yourself," said Jill. "That woman loves Pomeroy a million times better than she likes you."

He started and stared. Her curious eyes were fixed on him; the light seemed to set her hair on fire. It burnt in little ragged flames about her ears and over her forehead. She took off her hat and put it on her lap. Then, having pushed back her hair, she donned the black hat again.

"What are you saying?" he asked harshly.

"'Tis like this, Matthew Northmore. Pomeroy made three people hate him: you and me and Emanuel Codd. I hated him because he wouldn't come back to my apern-strings after Samuel died; and Codd hated him over money; and you hated him for your own reasons."

"And he hated me."

"He said so; but it wasn't real hate—not then. Only noise and bluster. He ban't built for steady, patient hating, or steady, patient loving either. But that's not here or there. In my rage I met Emanuel Codd, and

when he told me that he was going to be level with Pomeroy, I said nothing against it. 'Twas Emanuel Codd burnt your ricks and your stock: that's what's on my conscience to tell you. He confessed it to me, and my sin was that I kept it hid. He planned all—to make you think that Pomeroy had done it. But whether you do think so or not ban't my business. I only want to cleanse my soul of this, so as by no wicked chance I should let you suspect an honest man. Pomeroy's done many silly things and said many more; but he had no hand in this cruel job. And if you like to call your man, I'll face him with this now on the spot."

Northmore as yet quite failed to digest the significance of all he heard. He rose mechanically and went to the door; then he stopped and turned.

"Never mind him," he said. "This means the end of him. You say that Codd planned the fire; but the papers—Pomeroy's papers that I found?"

"That was where the devil helped," said Jill calmly. "Ives came here the day of the fire, because he knew that you were out of the way, to speak to Codd. Then Codd put him in a rage and he flung off and galloped away, and never thought to put back some papers and things he'd taken out of his pocket. The rest is easy to be seen. 'Twas put into Codd's head to plant the fire on Pomeroy for your eyes to find alone."

In this most lucid explanation Jill made but one error, and that intentional. She substituted the Prince of Darkness for herself and gave him all the credit of her own ingenuity. Then she rose to depart.

"Of course whether you found Pomeroy's papers or not, I don't know. But, so far as I'm concerned, I only tell you what Codd told me, and I ask you to forgive me for keeping it from you. I know 'twas wicked and cowardly and mean. But 'twas done out of hate of Ives Pomeroy, not from any ill-will to you. I didn't care a button

about you one way or t'other then. Now I do care about you, and I've forgiven Pomeroy. So there it stands."

She rose, but he apparently had ceased to hear or perceive her. He was staring into the fire, and he had shrivelled up a little as the thing began to be better understood and traced to its sequence. His hands were between his knees; his chin had dropped; the firelight flickered over his pale beard.

"Good-night," said Jill. "I wish to hear you forgive me for bottling this up. I shall be your relation soon, and I don't want to be anything but friendly."

She waited at the door for him to answer, but he had grown oblivious of her presence, and he did not hear a word of the last diplomatic utterance. She knew well enough what must be in his mind; but he did not know that she knew it. Her attitude was quite masterly, and her future appeared to be perfectly safe.

Jill went out and shut the door behind her, while Northmore remained motionless beside the fire. His reception of her news convinced Jill that she was right, and that she had quenched Northmore's shadowy hope of happiness forever. Then she began to reflect. She looked into Stone Park kitchen and asked if Emanuel were at home. A man and his wife sat there together.

"He was here a bit ago," answered the labourer. "Then he went up the passageway; and then up to his chamber, I believe."

"I should like to see him," said the visitor.

But Emanuel was not found in his room.

"Must have gone down to the public-house, I suppose," suggested the woman, "though 'tis late for him to do so."

Jill departed, but at the gate she stopped and considered the situation from the standpoint of Mr. Codd. It was very likely that he had been listening, and had heard her confession. He could make no counter-attack, for it was he who had lighted the fire, and now his master

knew it. It occurred to her that Codd might be waiting on the fringe of the night in a mood not friendly. A man who would burn ricks and cattle might not hesitate, under provocation, to do worse.

The darkness was intense, and a thin rain blew in her face from the south. Jill decided not to go home by the road to Merivale. It was flanked by thorn trees and boulders and gorse clumps, all well calculated to conceal a man. She smiled at the idea of Emanuel waiting to brain her; then she took a wide circuit to the right, and trusted herself to the gloomy bosoms of the Staple Tors.

Left alone, Northmore, through the progress of many hours, watched his glittering palace of hope founder and fall. Not a ray of the many glimmering facets but went out; not a solitary rainbow gleam remained to haunt the ruin. Dust and ashes were his portion henceforth forever.

The position admitted of statement so simple that even in his present disorder of mind he could see it clearly. Ives Pomeroy was innocent, and Matthew had won Ruth with a lie. There could be no further shadow of justice in this engagement and he must instantly release her. Even temptation to persist did not offer itself, because it would presently be common knowledge that Codd had committed the crime. Jill must tell others; the thing could not be hid.

He struggled long and left no loophole of escape unexplored. Was it possible that Jill herself had lied, inspired thereto by Ruth? He clutched for a moment at the idea of a plot; but he dismissed it as vain. Jill had never associated his engagement with the business of the fire. Her sole concern had been to clear his mind of wrongful suspicions. He could not build on her conversation with him. It was purely destructive, and he assumed her innocent of any ulterior design. Thus nothing was left, because the whole edifice of his happiness had stood upon mistaken belief in another man's crime. The ruins were hideous and absolute. Ruth, then, must be lost to him.

Fearful suffering of spirit overwhelmed him to see joy and life thus snatched away after the fever and glory of the betrothal! He had paid ten pounds for her ring that morning; he had been planning his possessions for her all that day, and had imagined of her delight, when he should tell her what he had done. These small circumstances stung his mind again and again. For a time they persisted along with the main tragedy and recurred at intervals, like some little, pathetic treble melody running in a great fugue of mighty, sorrowful sounds; like a rivulet babbling of small blue-eyed flowers, where it winds through the savage and storm-stricken wilderness.

But detail died out of his soul as the night yawned onwards toward morning. The trivial things that he had meant to do—the small surprises planned, the furniture, the recreation of Stone Park parlour, the pictures, the piano—all were swept away and swallowed at last. For a time he dwelt in utter darkness and tasted the extremity of a defeated love. From the profundities of grief his mind, as though suffocating, struggled to the surface again and once more occupied itself with lesser aspects of his loss. Then it plunged him into the last bitterness and decided his future action. He remembered that Ruth did not yet know these things; and he wondered how he should tell her. Words were no vehicle for such tremendous intelligence. He would not speak; he would not write. A dreadful deed only befitted such a dreadful fact. She should learn explicitly that she was free. There was nothing left for him but the dust, and he longed to return to it. Self-destruction remained as the only road to peace. For hours he dallied with that dusky shadow until the idea grew just, reasonable and inevitable. To die must mean some sort of peace; to live was only to drag a weight of forlorn and useless wretchedness along the ways of the world. His time was past; his record was written. Of what avail to linger on, a naked spectre, stripped of every-

thing but his flesh and bones? He had emptied life; he had eaten and drunk enough of gall and brine; therefore he resolved to die. Ruth might understand; and, a sad memory, he must forever haunt her hereafter. That circumstance he could not alter, because, living or dead, she would remember him.

Again the bubbles on the surface of this flood arrested him. He thought of another, and went so far as to go to the door and call Emanuel Codd. It seemed to his brain that Jill had been gone for half an hour; but to his surprise blue dawnlight already filtered at the window. The hour was after six o'clock. He ascertained anon that Codd had left Stone Park on the previous night and had not returned.

Through the earlier portion of that day Matthew Northmore doubted; but after noon he was steadfastly affirmed to make an end of himself. He chose a special theatre for the act, and proceeded thither in forgetfulness that he had already promised an appointment for that hour and place.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE TORN BIBLE

WHILE Matthew Northmore was hearing a part of the truth, Ives cried for time to fly and bring the meeting at the Lone Stones. He fretted and stormed, now in his house, now on the farm, and his grandmother feared that he must be going out of his mind, for he told her nothing. She only knew that he had been in Plymouth for two days, and had now returned in a condition of terrible ferocity. His attitude reminded her of his youth; but there was no mother now to face him and quell him.

She did what she could; she tried to pacify him and learn the nature of his tribulations.

"You'll know soon enough—too soon for that matter," he answered, in response to her questions. "No, no; you can't do nothing, grandmother; nobody can do nothing but myself. The world's all out of bias for me, and always have been. This is only the right end for my beginning; but the end it will be."

He left the house at nightfall, and while he was away, Peter Toop called to see him.

"Lord alone knows where the man is, or what's overtook him," said Jane Pomeroy. "He was gallivanting to Plymouth for a bit; then he came home in the worst tantrum as I've known since Avisa died. Nought's right. He ballyrags his very dog and bids her get from his sight."

Thereupon Peter told Mrs. Pomeroy what she did not know, and related how Northmore had won Ruth Rendle.

"Why, then, 'tis all explained," she said. "And no worse news could have come into this house. He's left

it too long. If he'd only done what I told him, years ago, they'd have been man and wife and me a double great-grandmother afore to-day."

Peter rolled his head solemnly.

"I respect a great-grandmother something tremendous. 'Tis a stately situation to find yourself in, ma'am."

"'Tis nought—all along of marrying at seventeen. But quite a woman I was at that age, and not a fool neither, if I remember rightly. As to the unborn, 'tis they be a solemn subject; not us. I mind once talking to my darter-in-law—poor dear Avisa—and I cried out, 'Lord! what a lot of things they'll have to do!' meaning them to come. 'Yes,' she said, in her sudden, twinkling way, 'and one of the hardest will be to forgive us.' There's something in that. We don't think enough for 'em."

"I'm sure I do," said Peter, "and never more than just at present. To tell the truth, I feel almost frightened of 'em, if you understand that."

"They be a lottery, like what you'm going to do. Marriage is all a chance, and so's the childer that come of it. You'll find parents as can tell you, afore God, that their young never gave 'em a heart-ache, from the time they was born onwards; and there's others again whose faces shrink at the sound of a baby crying, as if it stabbed 'em to the heart. Then there's the danger of the good ones dropping and the bad ones keeping on. You may generally count on that, and 'tis easy enough to understand; because the Lord knows when we be ripe and when we be green. The good go most times; the bad be left to have another chance."

"You speak what you know. Not but what the good men and women hang on, too, or else, to say it without boasting, you and me wouldn't be here still."

"'Tis all a question for the Almighty, and only Him," declared the ancient woman. "He decides where we can be most useful, we good ones. Avisa was wanted up

along; my place be here with her boy. You might think as that wasn't the best plan that could have been hit on. But for certain it was. I always prayed not to be lonely when I comed up eighty year old. And, thank God, I never have been. There's quite a lot of middle-aged folk take notice of me still. Of course 'tis too much to ask of the young; but such people as you—getting within sight of the seventies yourselves—you can see age creeping close to you, and you feel for the aged accordingly."

Mr. Toop little liked this harsh allusion.

"Well, well," he said. "The heart of man decides his age; and the pluck of woman decides hers. Never say die's our motto. What I be here about is the stone at Sampford Spiney. As you know, Ives will have a new marble one, and he wants me to allow a bit off for the slate; but that's really unreasonable—firstly, because slate's out of fashion altogether; and secondly, because this Pomeroy slate is so thin to begin with, that once 'tis cleaned there'll be nought left."

"Always gardening on his mother's grave now," said Jane thoughtfully. "And 'tis a good way to keep him out o' mischief. But he cusses the church-tower something awful, just because it can't help throwing its shadow there, so as Avisa's favourite red roses don't grow vitty. However, as I tell him, you might so well cuss the sun's self, or the whole order of things in general, as a church-tower."

"Of course you might. Yet 'tis like the man. The impatience of him! He must have the very best of stone, of course, and then, because it took near a year to get the very best, he's down on me about it, and says I didn't know my own business!"

Ives came in at this juncture, and Peter turned to him.

"'Tis about the tombstone for your dear mother. I'm wishing you could be more patient. Think of her patience! What would six months more or less have been to her?"

To Jane Pomeroy's surprise, her grandson took this admonition quietly. He seemed weary and dispirited.

"That's true enough," he said. "And if it wasn't 'twould be no odds; for no man ever hurried you yet, though perhaps a woman will afore long."

He seemed in an amiable mood; but physical and mental dejection accounted for it. His supper was waiting for him and he began to eat.

"Trust me," continued Peter, "there's so much that a man in my calling have got to do in a hurry, that, where time allows, we are apt to take it. Of course, very few do all for the dead that I do. 'Tis generally divided up among different trades. However, I do all, and I feel it very comforting when a *ortège* has a dash to it and a funeral goes off with a bit of a sparkle."

"You talk of 'em as if they were fireworks," said Ives; and the undertaker started.

"Lord, how like your mother you spoke that!" he exclaimed. "Well, the stone will be at the shed for you to see next week; and, as to the slate, I can't take it in part payment. 'Tis useless for any purpose. But I've added my mite to the marble, in the shape of fifteen per cent. off, for respect of them under it, and more I can't do—especially as a man with marriage at the door. Good-night, good-night."

Peter hurried away to avoid argument over the superseded slate; but Ives was not interested.

"To think that woman, of all women, goes to an old man!" he said. His empty and lifeless voice struck Mrs. Pomeroy's attention.

"You'm tired, Ives. Be off to bed so soon as you've eat your meat. You'll be better in the morning."

"I shall never be better no more. Oh, grandmother, d'you know what's happened to me? Ruth—Ruth Rendle's going to take Matthew Northmore. At least she thinks so; but I know better. If 'tisn't me, it shall be

any but him. I'll drop him to-morrow, like I'd drop a bullock with a pole-axe. I'll do it, if he don't give her up once for all."

"Don't you tell such vain, terrible stuff, there's a good boy. You must think how it stands, and you'll do far better to see Ruth than him. You're that sensible of late, that you'll never go back now, I'm sure. If she's for him—well, you can't interfere. 'Tis her good you'm seeking above your own—that is if you love her honest."

"Her good—yes; and it doesn't lie with Northmore, or she'd have found it out years agone instead of just now. What have I done to choke her off me? That's the question. Ban't for love of him she's taken him; but for—what? Shall I say for hate of me? But I know better far than that. When I axed her to have me, what did she do? She fainted."

"Go to her; go to her again," advised the old woman. "In a way you've a right to know a bit more."

"Yes, I mean to know more; but 'tis the man shall tell me. 'Tis for him to explain. And yet—what can he say more? She's going to marry him; that's all that matters—to him. And if she does, my life's done; and if I stop him, my life's done. So 'tis all up with me either way. Not that I care, if I've lost her."

He talked for some time in this fashion, and his grandmother spoke patiently with him. After a while he calmed down a little, confessed faults and soothed himself by the process.

"Mind you, I never rated her high enough—never. I took her too much for granted, as a woman who'd do my bidding always. When I decided that I'd offer for her, I reckoned the job was as good as done. 'Twas natural that she should feel the other man would wear better than me. I allow all that, but I can't suffer it. She shan't have him. I've sworn so. I know him better far than

she does, and I know she'd be a miserable creature all her days along with that man. He shall go out of it, and she shall find somebody as'll make her a better husband than him or me."

"Think—think, Ives. Think how 'twould be if your mother was living."

"I know how 'twould be well enough. All different—all; because she would never have let this happen. Too fond of Ruth for that."

"But Ruth's old enough to judge for herself. There couldn't have gone no compulsion to it."

"How can I tell? I didn't hear his lies; 'tis the fashion of all my enemies to fight with lies behind my back. I'd—— There; but I'm calm and sensible enough. I can read men easy, and easiest of all that man. Look back at him. 'Twas him that got me put in prison—his work. And he've never changed, never. From the moment he falled in love with Ruth, his suspicious hatred woke against me, and he lost no chance to do me an injury."

"He did nought, however."

"For why? Because I never gave him the opening. But he's done something now—so deep and dark that Ruth—— Live! Not this time to-morrow, unless he takes his oath afore Christ Almighty that he'll never see her again."

He raged, physically refreshed with meat and drink; but anon he grew a little calmer.

"Smoke your pipe, boy," said Jane. "You never speak nor see so sensible as when you'm smoking. And your father was the same."

He obeyed and left his grandmother to do the talking. She strove with her old slow mind to be of service; but he was abstracted within himself, and heard little. The hour grew late, and Mrs. Pomeroy began to get very sleepy.

"Read just a few verses, like a dear, afore I go," she

said. "I've got to count on it, Ives, and I miss 'em a good bit when you'm not here."

Thus she spoke, because Ives, when at home, was accustomed nightly to read a chapter from the Bible for Jane's pleasure.

He now picked up the book from its place, turned to a marker in the Revelation of John, and began to read drearily. But after a dozen verses his own condition burst upon him, and swept away all self-restraint. For a moment he was almost insane.

"God damn it!" he cried out passionately. "How can I read this drivel and my life wrecked and ended? Don't you know there's murder in me? Ban't I going to kill a man if he don't yield? Hell take the book! It's never done no good to me, and never will."

He flung the volume on the floor with both hands, and the cover burst off. He then leapt up almost distraught, and kicked it across the kitchen floor into a corner.

"Ives! Ives! You've tored the forels off your mother's Bible. Oh, Ives!"

He had sat down again, and put his arms on the table and his head upon them.

"Go," he said. "Get to bed, grandmother. Leave me to finish this business my own way."

She began to creep over to the sacred book; but he bade her leave it alone.

"I tell you to go! I can't bide even the sight of you any more to-night. Here——"

He rose and took a hot brick from the grate. She handed him an old woollen shawl, and he saw tears run down her face.

"Don't take on," he said. "'Tis no fault and no business of yours. You women who bring children into the world, 'tis no good crying in your age to find that children and sorrow are names for the same thing."

He wrapped the shawl about the hot brick and then

went up to her room in front of her. It was a customary event, and the brick kept his grandmother warm by night.

"Kiss me, Ives—and—and—oh, boy—pray to God with all your fiery heart afore you go to sleep—to please your dead mother, do it."

"Sleep—sleep! I shan't never sleep no more," he said. "I've done with sleep. There ban't no sleep for men who can tear Bibles and curse God."

He kissed her face and left her and licked an old woman's tear off his lips as he went down the stairs. Age and weariness soon buried the ancient in oblivion; the man returned to his thoughts and his future. It was past midnight and he calculated that sixteen hours must still separate him from his enemy. He considered how to pass them. He resolved the matter of taking Northmore's life, and for a long time was set remorselessly upon it.

Fate is blind; otherwise there had passed before her eyes that night the spectacle of a very strange, imminent collision between two men. One, in his lonely and sequestered agony, was thinking of the other; one, of himself alone. Northmore, though he knew it not, stood within a double terror: he began to dream of destroying himself; and his enemy was also minded to destroy him. At all points the master of Stone Park stood faced with a problem more terrific than any before his rival; and yet the solution of that problem was more certain. For no two men, in the history of man, did ever day dawn darker, or greet with a horror more assured.

CHAPTER XLIV

OLD TEXTS

THERE was none that Pomeroy could ask for help, and in his isolation, with a very poignant intensity, he realized how much Ruth had been to him—how much more than he had understood or appreciated, even in his highest ardour of love. Only now, in the moment of loss, her precious attributes impressed themselves with burning, aching acuteness upon his brain. To her he had not seldom turned of late when faced with minor perplexities; for he was of the sort who find advice from women better to the taste than counsel of men; and he did not disdain to consult them, where pride hindered any reference to his own sex. But in this vital matter, involving herself, Ruth could not be approached, and there remained only Northmore, since no other was familiar with the truth.

So Pomeroy argued from his insufficient knowledge.

He turned to the kitchen, sat down by the fire, and reflected for above an hour. He tried to state the case in terms, but they tumbled to pieces and only one clear fact dominated his senses. He wanted Ruth above all living things. That he might have her was his mother's hope and prayer. Avisa had worked for it; she had died desiring it. For a long time he occupied himself with the situation and believed that justice and right demanded the marriage between Ruth and himself. Then he endeavoured to appreciate the position from another standpoint. It was not until some hours afterwards that he began to look out of Northmore's eyes. For the present he merely regarded Northmore's conduct through his own, and concluded that Matthew had used man's force in some evil way and driven Ruth to accept him despite her own aversion. Nothing

could justify a step so infamous; no punishment could be too heavy for it. Seriously he resolved with himself to destroy Northmore; and that such a step must also mean his own destruction did not deter him.

But a saner outlook came anon, and he perceived the enormity of any such project. In spirit he had reached the actual deed and looked down upon a dead man lying at his feet. Then the apparition, by its own horror, helped to dispel the rapt frenzy that had summoned it. He woke from his monstrous dream and, in the silent atrium of deep night, grew wiser. The clock purred two, and something of his mother's divine reasonableness awoke in Pomeroy and spread, like an anodyne, about the sore places of his soul. It quickened upon a thought, and for a season lifted him to more placid reflection. Its power lay largely in the fact that Ruth now became obscured and Northmore filled his mind. For the first time with honesty he strove to see from Matthew's standpoint. Was it just to scorn and loathe this man? Northmore had never ceased from loving Ruth. Like a fixed star his worship had burnt unflickering through the years. He had seen the glory and value of Ruth, while Ives still turned from her as a maiden of no account; long since he had read those secrets of character that made Ruth notable and rare; but only yesterday did the revelation dawn for Pomeroy.

And then he thought of Ruth and asked himself whether it was strange that she should put Northmore's enduring and steadfast trust and worship before his sudden flame. He looked back to his mother's illness and Ruth's sojourn at the Vixen.

"She knows me too well," he said. He told himself that right was happening; and then, instantly upon this admission, the large, generous spirit died in him as a light died upon the sea. What were the other man's fortitude and faithfulness after all? What was Northmore? He was one who hunted Ruth as remorselessly as he hunted

hares. A thousand times she had shown him that the thing he desired was hateful to her; a thousand times she had turned and struggled and made vantage of ground to escape from him. But he had run her down at the end. She was not dedicated to him; she was not sacred to him. No dying woman with her last conscious glance had woven them together.

Ferocity and fiery indignation reigned in Ives again. His instinct told him that he had made too good a case for Northmore. There was much more to know before he could tamely relinquish Ruth. Had not she and he trembled on the very brink of love a hundred times? Was he so fresh and raw that he could not tell what a woman's eyes said? Ruth loved him, and following that conviction, all changed again. He looked back through the years and saw her love at every turn. Little deeds, little thoughts, little broken impulses checked—they had taken place under his eyes; but his soul, busy with the mother, had found no time to read them then. Now they returned from the hoarding-places of memory, and he counted and weighed them and wondered at them. Like glimmering dewdrops on a leaf, had he and she stood beside each other waiting for the breath of the morning wind to run together. They had touched at last and must melt into each other. No power in all nature was strong enough to hold them asunder any more. Into one they must merge, and in one they must remain, until there should come that larger incorporation with all things, called death.

At three o'clock he remembered that little more than twelve hours kept him from the meeting with Northmore. He thought of his bed, but put it off a while. For some time he walked up and down with long strides that fell heavily but silently. Then his foot touched something and he saw his mother's Bible. The cover lay apart. He picked up the book and marked beside it a piece of paper somewhat stained with age. One side was blank, but he turned

it over and found words and letters. Next he picked up the cover of the book and went to the table.

The strip of paper was a list of references to many texts of scripture. They had been set down by his mother, and evidences of age already marked the earlier entries. He noted that the writing began somewhat shakily; then the figures and letters became strong and steady; and at last they shook again and grew very faint and feeble. The final reference was written with a lead pencil, and the characters trembled much. That these words and figures thus grew weak towards the end moved Ives more than the discovery of them. He gazed long and the present sank to sleep. Then vanished days awoke and once again he lived through his mother's passing.

He rose at last and was going to put the paper with other scraps and written memorials left of her, cherished and hidden safely. Then, seeing the Bible at his elbow, he sat down again and idly turned to the text that headed this memorandum.

"And teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born."

His mother had set it down before a son or daughter came to her, and Pomeroy wondered whether the issue had been himself or one of his sisters. He sought the second text.

"God hath judged me and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son."

It was the coming of Ives thus chronicled! His mother had prayed for a boy, then. And her God had only sent Ives. He thought of Avisa's joy in his infancy and saw himself clouding it day by day. He feared to read further; then he turned to the third text. The writing was firm and strong again.

" God be gracious unto thee my son."

He speculated as to the age of this entry and turned to yet another. This showed him that he was a baby still.

" Can a woman forget her suckling child? "

He saw himself cuddled at the breast that was dust; he caught the twinkle in his mother's eyes as she hugged him.

He read again, and the following text was quite trivial; yet the words had brought a smile to Avisa's eyes when she set them down; and they dimmed his now.

" His mother made him a little coat."

He remembered how she had spoken of that little coat when her mind wandered on the shores of death.

A great wave of interest set Pomeroy's heart throbbing and the present still slept for a while before this story from the past. Because here, through a channel never guessed, there flowed most precious intimacies between himself and his mother. They began before he was born, and they attended his babyhood. He suspected the tale of his life might be hidden in these texts—the whole journey seen through his mother's eyes and copied with love from the words of her only book. He felt the melody in them, and yet he wondered, for his mother had neither driven him to the Bible nor much insisted upon it. He could seldom remember texts upon her lips; yet it seemed that her heart was stored with them.

Another question followed.

" What shall I do for my son? "

He was a boy now and she began to look ahead for him. The next verse meant more than he could know or guess at.

"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers."

He remembered his father not at all, but Avisa had often told him that the elder Ives loved the younger well. What followed seemed the picture of a beautiful home; but still the texts dealt with a time before his recollection.

"And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

Ives wondered when first he began to break that peace and wake a new element of anxiety in his mother's mind. The next verse spoke of sorrow and definitely fixed its own date in the little chronicle.

"If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

The words told that Avisa's first child was dead, and Pomeroy, now greedy of this close and unutterably precious revelation, almost resented the fact that his mother's first-born found any place in it. He eagerly sought for himself again; but it seemed that a considerable interval of time had passed between the last entry and the next.

His father had now died and Avisa was alone.

"Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me."

"Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child."

The story unfolded and the next three verses pointed very directly to himself.

"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with a rod, he shall not die."

"Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."

There had always been hope in her heart for him. Nothing that he could do killed that imperishable emotion. She had died full of hope for him.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it."

That prophecy was vain. How far had he himself strayed from the way that she had trained him to go? Where did he stand now? He turned impatiently forward and read again. The next text succeeded naturally upon the last and seemed to show his mother's hand tighten on him as she set herself to obey her guides.

"It is good for man to bear the yoke in his youth."

Her yoke had ever been easy; yet he remembered the discipline, too, and its apparent futility to build character or beget self-control. His face grew dark and sorrowful. Then woke a gracious personal element in the dumb narrative that made him sad and happy together, and struck a solemn note of emotion for him that died not from that day forever when the words recurred.

"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit and was in the deserts. . . ."

"See the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed."

He dwelt very long over those words and turned onward reluctantly. For his soul told him there was sorrow hidden in the little figures and letters that remained. Childhood had ended; youth lay ahead. It could not be that any great hour of all the hours that were passed had been forgotten by the unsleeping watchfulness that set down this story.

He read the last verses again, and they seemed good to him, and brought his boyhood and the guardian of it alive and very close. He looked back from man's standpoint, and understood as a child cannot understand. He perceived the grace and comeliness of his mother when she was young. He guessed that the young do not consider the youth of their mothers or understand it, more than mothers perceive the manhood and womanhood of those they have borne. To the child the parent is always old; to the parent the child never can be.

Ives lingered here upon the golden shore of a young mother's dream. And then he read on and saw the steadfast chronicler quelling her own doubts. His mother began not to understand him. It was not egotism that appropriated the succeeding text to himself. It could refer to no other.

"But wisdom is justified of her children."

He dropped the paper and stared in front of him. "I know how 'twas," he said to himself; "how well I know what was in mother's thought then! I hadn't begun to break her heart yet; but she's got a dim glimpse of such a thing falling out some day. And then she went to her book by night and found this and rested on it."

The next verse, however, showed that the mother had not rested long. Her faith cried out from Christ's generality to Christ's self. She carried her best offering and set it before her Lord.

"Master, I have brought unto thee my son."

It seemed necessary for Avisa to cry louder, that she might be heard.

"Master, I beseech thee look upon my son."

Well he knew the things that were happening then; and very clearly he heard the heart-stricken cry that followed:

"Lord, have mercy on my son."

"I laid in Tavistock prison the night she set that down," he thought. And then, reading the next verse, he pictured the days of waiting and the longing that each night would bring him back again while still he tarried and would not return to her.

"For her bowels yearned upon her son."

"The secrets of that woman's heart!" he said.
The following verse told that he was home again.

"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

A considerable space of years fell between this entry and the next intimate record; but two texts seemed to bridge the gulf and indicate leading trains of thought in the mother's mind. One was a general sentiment echoed of her own instinct.

"For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children."

The second sounded a hopeful spirit and spoke of a home at peace.

"I have no greater joy than to know that my children walk in truth."

A direct admonishment to him came next, and spoke of the dawn of his great tribulation. This verse his mother had actually repeated to him in the past, and he recollected the fact clearly.

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction."

Another verse from Proverbs followed and spoke of anxious days and nights for Avisa Pomeroy.

"My son, be wise and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me."

He guessed at the hidden care and stress upon her now, and remembered that this happened when rest and mental peace were vital to her health. She felt that the cruel strain he had put upon her was more than she could bear in those days; and she had cried for strength to save him.

"O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid."

It almost seemed that this, her great prayer, had been answered, for he remembered the event and how he had flung over Jill Bolt at the last moment. His mother at least regarded the course which he had taken as victorious.

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

There remained but one more reference. The writing was weak and the words and figures barely legible.

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

She had yielded him up to her God at her death—but only then. Here lay recorded her farewell of him and he understood the thought in her mind.

The magic of this fair discovery lingered like a sunset about the spirit of the man; then, into this new encompassment of thought, intruded his present circumstances and he regarded the morrow. It had already dawned, for the morning wind and a wan fore-token of light were at the casement together. He had taken two long hours to read this message, because there occurred lengthy intervals of thought between the brief morsels of it. They had stood merely as stepping-stones from point to point; they had been as texts for the sermon of his life. From this great survey he came back to the present; but he did not come back alone. The mother's heart was against his; her spirit belonged to him as the intrinsic controller of his own. Again he turned to the Bible for a text that he remembered dimly. He knew the source of it and came upon it anon. Then he read it and set down chapter and verse under Avisa's last written word.

"Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood."

What fruit should the scion of this stock ripen in the world's garden? Can we gather a thorn from a grape?

"That woman's son have got no choice," he said to himself, and in ignorance uttered great truth.

He began to think upon Avisa's love of Ruth, and Ruth's worship of Avisa. But the past was past, and Ruth, looking forward, had weighed her own hopes of happiness and calculated wherein they might most surely lie. Who should blame her? Were peace and content a small matter? If, indeed, she had been brought to love Matthew, was it wonderful? Herself the soul of steadfast trust, could such a man fail finally to win her? His very qualities were her own.

Pomeroy decided to do no hurt to Northmore. He determined to go to the meeting place with empty hands, to wait the other's pleasure, and listen quietly to all that

he might speak. His first purpose, indeed, inclined him to break the appointment and see the other man no more; but desire to hear further concerning the great matter was too strong within him; and he made up his mind to go.

As for his own future, it was paralysed; because he could not see whither life without Ruth Rendle would lead.

He turned again to the message and took it up with him to his room.

CHAPTER XLV

THE SUNSET FIRE

Day dawned in gloom and rose clothed with a garment of heavy rain that fell straight out of the low sky. No wind stirred and only the foothills of the land thrust forth from the fog-banks that hid the hills. A sluggish, reeking air hung along the woodland ways; and aloft the grassy slopes glimmered grey with wet; the heather sulked; the battered brake-fern lay in water-sodden stretches among the rocks in a sepia so rich that the granite shone by contrast. The lofty world of the tors sometimes showed like a shadow through the cloud-cap hanging upon it, then vanished again; the rain fell silently and steadily; the day passed its meridian and swiftly waned. And then light suddenly spoke and evening was brighter than noon had been. A low orange flame wakened, and flickered along the edges of the mist. It played over the fringes of the vapour, found Walla and flashed there. Parallel to earth it ran, and so struck the least stock of stone sharply; it decked the naked thorn tree in a network of jewels; it glittered on the furze and set the boulders burning.

The mists in level folds were impervious to this sudden flow of sunset light; but they acted as a background for the wonder, and against their deep bosoms the world underwent a magic illumination, here roseal and mild, here lurid and barbaric in its fierce and dazzling glare.

Seen and unseen were divided sharply. The very heart of the foreground was plucked out by these sunset fires; and behind them hung the cloud curtains, impenetrable to eye of man or ray of light.

Against the aërial darkness behind them the Lone Stones

glowed like a circle of flame. Their ruddy, stunted columns flashed here upon the very edge of the hill; and all behind and beneath was purple shadow, and all before was the waning splendour of the West. Hither came Ives Pomeroy to his tryst and found himself the first there. The hour was about four o'clock, and Ives, upon his way, had taken a detour so that he might not go nigh Stone Park. He came armed only with the memory of the night, and he waited patiently in a sort of desolate peace; but he did not review his attitude or intention, for both were assured.

If Ruth loved this man better than she loved him, there ceased his right to say another word. He would, however, hear what Northmore had to tell him; because Matthew had promised a revelation, and he was come to learn it. There, if the matter proved not vital to Ruth, he would leave all and interfere no more. The other delayed to come, but no faltering marked the mind of Ives. He had passed through the secret height and depth of this tribulation; he was strong to yield. In his heart he had already yielded, and his renunciation might be called complete. On the side of reason only the surrender was not absolute. It remained to hear what Northmore had to say. There might be no mystery; there might await him no more than the fact that Ruth now loved Northmore and meant to marry him. Ives determined that, say what Matthew might, he would believe him.

The light failed fast, and the West sank like a dying torch before the other man appeared. Out of the heath he rose presently, and Pomeroy, with his back against the great stone of the circle and his arms folded on his breast, stood motionless and watched him approach. Suddenly his interest increased as the master of Stone Park drew near, for there was much that appeared strange about him. A terrible change had come over Northmore. It seemed that he was drunk, and Pomeroy at first supposed that it

must be so. There rose a sudden hate for this wretch in the mind of the younger. The foothold of Matthew was weak. He staggered and reeled forward. Once he stopped and sat on a stone and mopped his face. Then he seemed to observe the circle suddenly and came on again.

In doubt of his next action and impressed with the folly of any meeting between Northmore and himself under these conditions, Ives hesitated; then he slipped down to be out of sight, crept near the further rim of the ring and crouched invisible that he might better judge of the other's state.

Northmore was quickly on the spot and he stood there gasping a while with his face lifted. It shone with sweat and the sky painted its pallor yellow. The farmer was not drunk, but he suffered under great excitation. His eyes were terrible thus lighted by the sky, and they blazed with such a savage misery that the watcher supposed he looked upon a madman.

The unhappy spirit believed himself alone and turned his gaze round about the circle. Then he remembered a certain spot in it and flung himself down upon the reeking earth, where aforetime he had fallen when a woman first said nay to him. He remained motionless with his face to the ground, and Pomeroy, making close scrutiny of him, saw that Matthew's hair was growing thin upon the poll.

Now Ives knew not what to do. He felt neither pity nor anger; but he found himself most deeply concerned to gather the meaning of this great passion. He wondered whether Ruth had changed her mind. Many reflections, doubts, and even hopes sped hurtling through his brain; but still he watched and waited. In his excitement he peered boldly out from behind the stone that hid him; but Northmore was unconscious of any presence and his eyes were turned inward. Had every stone in that circle of stones suddenly revealed a watching man, he had not seen them.

Suddenly Matthew sat up, rose to his feet and acted

swiftly while his heart held to its purpose. First he tore open his waistcoat and shirt, then he drew from his pocket a revolver and cocked it. He held it to his side; then changed his mind and lifted it to his head. The hesitation saved his life. For a moment this most unexpected horror kept Pomeroy motionless; then he leapt forward and shouted loudly as he did so. Northmore turned and started as he pulled the trigger. Thus only fire scorched his temple; the bullet missed it and struck off a splinter from the stone behind him. Opportunity to shoot again was not granted, for Ives tore the weapon away and flung it far into the fog. They stood silent, panting within arm's length of each other; and it was Matthew who spoke first.

"You—you of all men! What do you do here?"

"Me—yes. Who should it be? Wasn't we to meet here?"

Northmore looked at him as at a strange creation unfamiliar in his eyes.

"I come to meet my death—not you," he said.

"Button up your breast. You forgot I was to be here, but thank the Lord I didn't. You stare, but you're not more puzzled than me. You know a lot I don't, seemingly, else you'd never have come here to blow your brains out. And I know more than you. Since I've saved your life, I can tell you that a few hours agone I was minded to do for you what you meant to do for yourself. You've got to thank not me, but God Almighty, that you're a living man."

The other seemed slowly to waken and return to his senses.

"There's no thanks due—no thanks due—no thanks due," he kept repeating, in a monotonous voice, like an animal crying. "If I'd known that you meant to kill me, I'd have come sooner. I want to go out of it. I must go out of it. Can mortal man face this and live?"

"Face what?" asked Ives. "Don't give way no more. You've come back to life by a short cut; and that's as

much as to say you haven't done with the world, and the world haven't done with you. If what ails you is my work, let me have it. Things have happened to me, too, though 'tisn't likely in such as me the force of 'em will last very long. Better you speak and say all you want to say afore I change again."

But the other had not yet gathered his shaken wits together. He had indeed returned to life by a short cut. But he was dazed, obscured, inconsequent.

"Here she first said 'No,' and here I was going to make an end of it. You—you've done no service to me nor yet to yourself. What can she do now? It all depends on me—all—every atom of it. She's promised—she'd never go from her word—not even if I confessed that she had promised under false pretences. Never—the soul of honesty is that woman. She'd never go from her word, I tell you."

"And aren't you honest, too?" asked Ives.

The other did not answer, but rambled on.

"I was dragged here to die—where she refused me first. Yes—she refused me once. That may surprise you. And why were you here—waiting, and why instead of letting me go out of your path you . . ."

"Come, come," said the saner man, "get at peace with yourself. Quiet down your intellects afore you try to tell me what 'tis all about. Something very terrible must have happed, else you'd never have thought to do what you meant to do. You owe me more than hard words for preventing it. Close up your shirt, else you'll catch harm. Let's walk along together."

Northmore did not answer for some time; but he obeyed and covered himself. Then he began to try and explain.

"I came here to die," he said. "I wanted to die, because what I had planned and hoped and ordered—all tumbled to nothing. I forgot about you and meeting you. I never thought to see a human face again."

"Say as much or as little as you please," answered Ives. "I've had a bit of a sweat over this job, too, and things came up before my eyes that opened 'em pretty wide to the real question. I mean afore all else for that woman to be happy, and so do you. And if she's going to be happy along with you—there, no need to make me say the words. But I've done with it. You've won her—dogged and fair and straight. I'll allow that, and I was here to say it—unless you had anything else to say. Anyway I only want her good. If I can help her happiness by going out of the way, 'tis done. There 'tis in plain words, and there's nought more to be said."

"No more to be said! You know nothing. If it stood so——?"

"Keep moving—you'm wetted through. I'll see you home."

Gradually Northmore turned to a more coherent frame of mind. Then he essayed to explain the facts and did not spare himself in the process. Pomeroy heard all without speaking. He passed through many moods as the story with its plot unwound on Northmore's faltering tongue; but at the end one mighty fact swallowed all lesser emotions. Ruth was free to do as she would; and she had only accepted Northmore out of love for Pomeroy.

"You're an honest man," said Ives at last. "I'll say nought about what you meant to do, and I've only one quarrel against you: that you believed that damned scamp's word. But 'tisn't strange you found it easy, seeing what promised to come of it; and since you did believe it, I suppose 'twasn't in human nature to help using it, and driving it home on Ruth. Belike I'd have done the same."

"She loves you. She's always loved you; and I knew it, and yet—— But it's told now. I don't want your pity, but I want you to forgive me. As for punishment, you've punished me enough. I should be in eternal peace this

minute if it wasn't for your hand. You've got your revenge so long as I live."

"A time will come when you'll think different to that. 'Tis not strange you felt a sudden want to be out of it. But—well—God knows I can't preach. Only this, you shall swear to me afore I leave you: that you'll not make away with yourself. I'll dog you day and night until you swear it! I feel terrible curious about your life now; I've got a hold on it; and I call you to promise me that you won't lift a hand against yourself no more, Matthew Northmore. For the sake of that woman, keep alive. I don't ax for myself. Her days will be darkened for evermore if you kill yourself through her fault."

"I won't kill myself, but I'll go. I'll drag on with it somewhere till the end."

"You can't say no fairer, and I'm coming backalong with you—to have a drink. You want one."

So that significant scene faded upon a colourless idea, as the day faded upon colourless darkness.

The two men went away slowly together and left the circle empty. Whereupon the fog, as though waiting only for their departure, stole heavily up, thickened to fine rain, added gloom to night, and hid the Lone Stones and the great spaces round about. Water twinkled down the pillars; a dense and fumid air engulfed them; while beneath this dripping murk, Nature's unforgetting finger brought life to each grey lichen, succour to the wounded stone. For her hand touched the bruised granite where a bullet had broken it, and the operation of healing began instantly upon infliction of the hurt.

CHAPTER XLVI

PRIMROSEN

THERE came a morning in early spring when Pomeroy left his home with the light to keep an appointment. Some very striking new raiment appeared in his chamber, but he did not don these things. Instead he put on working day attire and an old cap. Then he went out of doors, sank to Walla, crossed the stream, and ascended on the other side.

The sun had not risen and only the earliest birds were waking. A thrush made sleepy music from a silver fir, that stood on the edge of the grey light. The glens were full of dew and the sky was almost clear.

Hither came Moleskin to meet Ives. The old man brought a little bunch of primroses culled from some secret spot familiar to him.

"You've kept your word," he said. "And so have I. 'Twas a promise to Ruth that if she was married any day after February I'd get her primrosen for her wedding gown. For certain she'll have braver blossoms, too; but she promised for to wear these, and here they are."

He handed Ives the flowers. Moleskin knew their haunts as he knew the haunts of other natural things in his wild world.

"I hark back to boyhood come primrosen time—always," he said. "I go back to the days when I was a bit of a lad. And all's the same—flowers, feathers, fins. They don't change no more than the bed of the river or the hovers of the trout. 'Tis only us that change. Smell 'em—just the same sweetness that met our great-great-grand-

fathers' noses. And they grow the same and peep out come the spring again, like maidens from behind their window-blinds."

"It's good to go back a bit if you'm old, I suppose," said Ives.

"Yes, it's good; but it's——" Moleskin broke off. "And so here's your wedding day, Pomeroy, and a fine one, too! Tavistock at twelve o'clock. Don't fear I shall miss it. There's a whole rally of us driving over in Peter's waggonette. Him and his wife are coming, too. Trust her!"

"Lizzie bides along with Ruth to-night down there. But Arthur Brown can't get away. Here's his letter. 'Twill amuse you since you know the man."

He handed the communication to Moleskin and smelt the primroses while his neighbour read. They would be on Ruth's breast soon; but he had nothing to envy them.

"A fine copybook hand to be sure," said Moleskin.

"Yes; and a fine copybook mind behind it."

"Such men be the backbone of the nation, without a doubt. I see he tells that his youngster has been ill; and the good man is evidently a little bit surprised at God Almighty, that He could suffer such a thing to happen. A wonderful chap—light to your shade—eh, Ives—or is he shade to your light?"

"How's Mrs. Cawker?" asked Ives.

"Helping with her needle against our Mary's wedding. What a woman—eh? And what a frame! There'll be a great battle of soul against clay when that noble creature's got to go. But never mind; nobody but you and Ruth to-day. 'Tis your day. If your mother only wasn't gone! 'Twould have been her high-water mark of happiness to see you two joined presently."

"She don't seem as dead as she was," answered the other. "I can't make my meaning very clear, I'm afraid—yet, if any man could grasp hold of it, perhaps you're

the one. 'Tis that mother's nearer and more alive to me, even now, than many of the real, live people round about."

"Well, I understand! Some are more alive, though they be dead, than others all the days of their life. And her—her—why, she's not dead so long as you'm stirring, my bold hero! Why, you may even grow to be worthy of such a mother yet."

"Never," he said. "No son's worthy of such a woman as Avisa Pomeroy."

"Some of 'em used to wonder how 'twas you didn't take more after her; but 'twas only their blindness. I knowed she was there—waiting to show in you, poor chap. And out she came when most you had need of her, I reckon. How's Matthew Northmore by the same token? Have 'e heard aught of him?"

"He's not coming back—got a farm t'other side the Moor, Chaggeyford way. He's well—so he says."

Moleskin nodded.

"A spark of wisdom in him not to come back. And it opens up the interesting question of who'll have Stone Park. We must hope for a large-hearted creature."

But Pomeroy was not considering Stone Park.

"Two," he said, harping back to the great matters in his mind. "Two of the best women God ever made, and one—one bore me—and t'other be going to marry me. I've had a mighty deal more luck than my share, Moleskin."

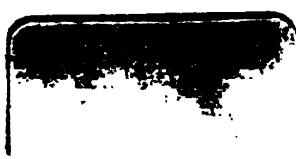
"You have without a doubt; but that's a very common thing—whether good luck or bad. Nought in nature's rarer than to see man or woman getting their desert."

They had come down to the brink of the river, and here parted.

"See you later," said Moleskin. "Take care of they primrosen, and joy go to her along with 'em."

As the men vanished, each upon his path, there woke a great light out of the east, and the birds sang together.

Dawn bloomed rather than broke—budded and bloomed where little cloudlets opened scarlet petals under the feet of day. Then this transparent radiance of heaven, finding earth, glittered over long leagues of dew, tinctured the crystal of Walla, and kissed Dartmoor—Mother of rivers, Guardian of the rain—as she awoke and lifted her misty eyes to the morning.

THE END

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